



# THE CALIFORNIA PRINTMAKER

THE JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF PRINTMAKERS 2019

## Social Statements



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## CSP 2020 JOURNAL

About the next journal...

The topic will be *Variations on a Theme: How Printmaking in a Series Influences the Artist and the Art.*

We are interested in how working in a series helps you express your ideas, discover new directions and develop a cohesive body of work. We are also interested in your process, including methods and materials.

We invite submissions. Contact [bobroccoart@gmail.com](mailto:bobroccoart@gmail.com). Please spread the word!

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Front cover, *Between the Lies 2*, Monotype & Screenprint, 32" x 24", 2019

Back cover, *Facts are Stubborn Things*, Monotype & Screenprint, 32" x 24", 2019

## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Many of the contributors to this year's journal used screenprint, woodcut or stencil to represent their ideas. These methods have high graphic impact, are low-tech, easily accessible and have often been used for social comment. For centuries woodcut was the predominant form of printmaking, and a great number of artists used that medium to skewer elites and expose the evils of contemporary culture. This tradition continues and we want to focus on the great variety of ways printmakers continue to connect to society. The articles represent views of printmaking from five countries, with subjects that span a variety of socio-economic and ethnic groups. The topics are wide-ranging, including human trafficking, obesity and toxic waste.

To reach out to society these artists not only express their views, but also encourage others to use printmaking to express their own. Together they address political and social wrongs from the past, present and into the future. Printmaking has a long history as a vehicle for social change and we hope to honor it with these articles.

We also want to give special thanks to our proofreading volunteer, Eva Bernstein.

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## ABOUT CSP

During a time when global politics are ripe we acknowledge the print matrix and its crucial role throughout history as a means for self expression. Welcome to the next issue of *The California Printmaker*. This year's journal is on printmaking, politics and society and features 14 artists from around the world using their printmaking to connect to society or to comment publicly.

This past year CSP dipped into a global political topic with our exhibition ClimArt, inspired by the 2018 Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, where the focus of the show publicly addressed climate change. We displayed the work from 67 members at our annual membership show in Piedmont, and also hosted stunning exhibitions at the New Museum of Los Gatos, King's Art Center and Bridge Artspace. Our artist residency program was a success with Hj Mooij working with Max Stadnik doing risograph, and Robynn Smith working with Tomas Wojak doing large scale screenprinting. We'd like to welcome our 23 newest members from the past year and encourage everyone to get involved with this exceptional and historic organization.

CSP continues to offer ongoing opportunities to its membership through a variety of means: exhibitions, workshops, demos, lectures and a creative array of special events. Thanks for all the efforts that have been generously given to our organization.





## **SUGAR BLUES: SILKSCREEN USING CHOCOLATE INK ON SUGAR PLATES**

**Kamil Zaleski**

One of the problems in modern society is the consumption of too many calories in the form of unhealthy products combined with an insufficient level of physical activity which may lead to serious health issues. This duality of sugar and chocolate, which on the one hand stands for pleasure and satisfaction, simultaneously posing a threat to one's health, is manifested with the relentless and obsessive counting of calories, surrounding those blissful moments of eating one's favourite treats. It's difficult to imagine a world without sugar, as it is an additive to most food products and we consume it in all forms, starting in the morning with yoghurt and finishing the day with a Hawaiian pizza. This is due to the fact that sugar is relatively cheap to produce in relation to the obtained caloric value, and it is added to almost everything that we eat today, even including products that we would never suspect such as cigarettes or ketchup.

The creation of this graphic series was limited to using only edible products in the process—refined sugar, from which the plates were made and liquid chocolate, which acted as a substitute for graphic ink. The images were applied onto the plates utilising silkscreen. The amount of sugar and chocolate combined in one work, specifically relates to the printed images. Thus seemingly sweet in terms of the visual, iconographically are rather bitter in taste.

Consuming refined sugar leads to a significant rise in the level of glucose in the blood, and in certain circumstances may even result in our body plunging into crisis. Although our bodies over time have adapted to ever larger quantities of consumed sugar, obesity has become one of the main diseases of affluence. The number of people with diabetes has tripled since 1958, showing a strong correlation with the levels of sugar consumption that have increased at a similar pace. Joseph Beuys once said, "I took an extreme position in art and chose materials that are the very foundation of modern life and are not associated with art." Thus today's material could in fact be sugar.

Looking at the themes that these graphics address, it is not always obvious in what manner they should be described or interpreted; thus they do not always allow the viewer to easily determine their meaning. This in fact drives the focus of the viewers to the visual effects (and/or flavour) of the works. Ephemeral art is a testimony to a given moment and, for a fraction of a second, it reminds us of past events, giving room afterwards for new experiences that however do not go uninfluenced by our memories. Transience is an inherent feature of life, and art has always wanted to be eternal and long-lasting, just like the Greek Parthenon or Basilica of St. Peter. The transformations that took place in the twentieth century focused on the aspect of temporariness, putting forward the idea that only a memory is left in the viewer's mind. Viewers are encouraged to treat themselves and taste the graphics composed of sugar and chocolate, having in mind that, in accordance with the Futurists, if someone eats someone's work, he or she automatically becomes an artistic object.





If adopting this statement as truthful, the experience of an image using more than one sense seems to create new possibilities for graphic art.

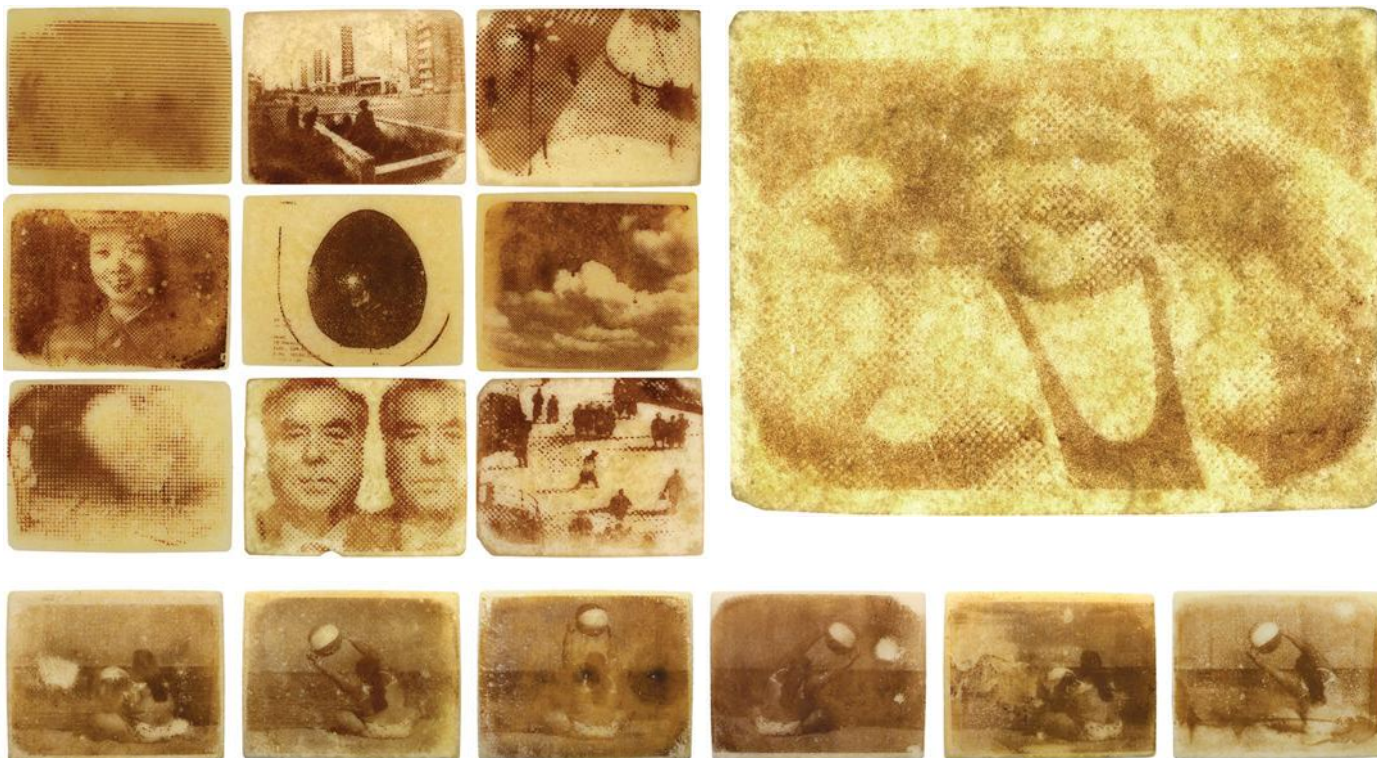
The entire series is compiled in the form of a diary with personal motifs as well as abstract ones, and ones that look at current events, with some of the works having their actual calorie content printed onto them. Eating one graphic made from about 800 grams of sugar and chocolate, theoretically should satisfy a human being's normal daily calorie intake. At least this is according to the caloric calculations on the packaging of the product used to make the graphics. Today every food product is converted into calories, which may be seen as an abstract number that tells us how much energy we can get out of it, while the word "nourishing" is becoming gradually more and more obsolete. The fetishization of numbers has not only grasped the world of food, it also refers to the consumption of art. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, "If you tell adults: I saw a beautiful house of red brick, with geraniums in the windows and pigeons on the roof," it is almost impossible for them to imagine such a house. What you have to tell them is, "I saw a house for one million dollars." Then they will shout out, "What a beautiful house!" This is often related to works using groceries in the context of criticism of art institutions, for which an exhibition of this type of artefacts was/is quite a challenge. On the other hand, Dieter Roth, looking into the aspect of decay, underlined that the temporality of artistic objects is only conceptual. Some of the presented works touch on current events like the series of North Korean women portraits coming from the reportage "Totalitarian systems." They try to steer

towards the discussion concerning whether the sweetness of a photo may overcome the trauma of the situation or does the trauma prevail. If we consume the sweet image, will we become more empathetic, or will we only be left with the pleasant taste of chocolate without any deeper reflection?

The works that are closest to my experience are the graphics with images referring to first aid. This is due to an event that I witnessed during my studies in Gdańsk in 2006, where an elderly man had an epileptic seizure at a bus stop as almost 30 commuters watched, none of them able or willing to help the elderly man. Only later did I find out, that the rules of first aid are rather simple and may indeed save a life. This was the inspiration for the series of works that try to address the aspect of teaching basic medical skills from an early age, which may seem meaningless, but may save someone's life. Maybe chocolate and sugar in the form of art can prove helpful in this quest.

There were a few reasons for using the screen printing technique for preparing the graphics. First of all sugar blocks are rather fragile, thus the pressure applied to the work while printing must be minimal in order for the sugar plates not to shatter, which often happens when the squeegee is used with extensive force. Secondly, sugar during the crystallization process produces air bubbles and the surface structure of the plate is slightly porous thus screen printing is most suitable for acquiring the best imagery. For this reason, in order to acquire a sufficient quality of the drawing, a large amount of ink in the form of liquid chocolate must be applied to the screen. An obstacle is keeping the temperature of the chocolate suitable—with a too high temperature, it becomes too fluid





and soaks through the screen. Too low temperature of the chocolate means it is too hard to apply. The production of sugar plates also requires patience and vigilance, as in non-industrial conditions it is quite difficult to maintain maximum hygiene of the entire production process. One of the critical moments in the process prone to failure is the pouring of melted sugar into plastic forms; if not heated enough, the sugar does not undergo crystallization and the plates come out too soft. However when heated too much, the sugar simply burns. The printing process itself often gives unexpected results. The properties of the chocolate ink may sometimes drastically change in the process, generating problems with squeezing through the screen when too cold, and resulting in extremely dark images if too hot. If the images are rasterized, the maximum screen ruling is 17 lines per inch. One of the aspects of these graphics is their ability to wear down as the result of the onlookers gradually licking off the chocolate image from the sugar plate. Often this process gains momentum when I treat myself to broken works, trying to find comfort in the arduous process.

Screenprinting as a technique in which fast printing of a large number of prints is possible, ideally suits the concept of graphics that are edible. It draws attention to the bipolarity of art and food. The juxtaposition of these two words has always been problematic because it was thought that art is for the spirit, food is for the body and today those boundaries are more and more obliterated, with both food and art intertwining. It is an attempt to face the boundary between a common object, which is a sugar plate—which in fact is just a big lollipop—with a

little chocolate added, and a piece of art that remains in the sphere of uniqueness. This is an attempt to combine both, so that the final effect would be more accessible to the everyday viewer.

### Artist Information

Kamil Zaleski graduated in Painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. In 2012 he defended his Phd dissertation at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw at the Faculty of Graphic Arts, where he currently works as an assistant in Prof. Węclawski's studio. He works at Viamoda College and is part of Open Art Studio Association.

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### Image Documentation

*Bez tytułu 1*, from the *Exercises* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2012

*Bez tytułu 1*, from the *Number* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2018

*Bez tytułu 3*, from the *Number* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2012

*Bez tytułu 4*, from the *Resuscitation* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2012

*Bez tytułu 7*, from the *Resuscitation* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2012

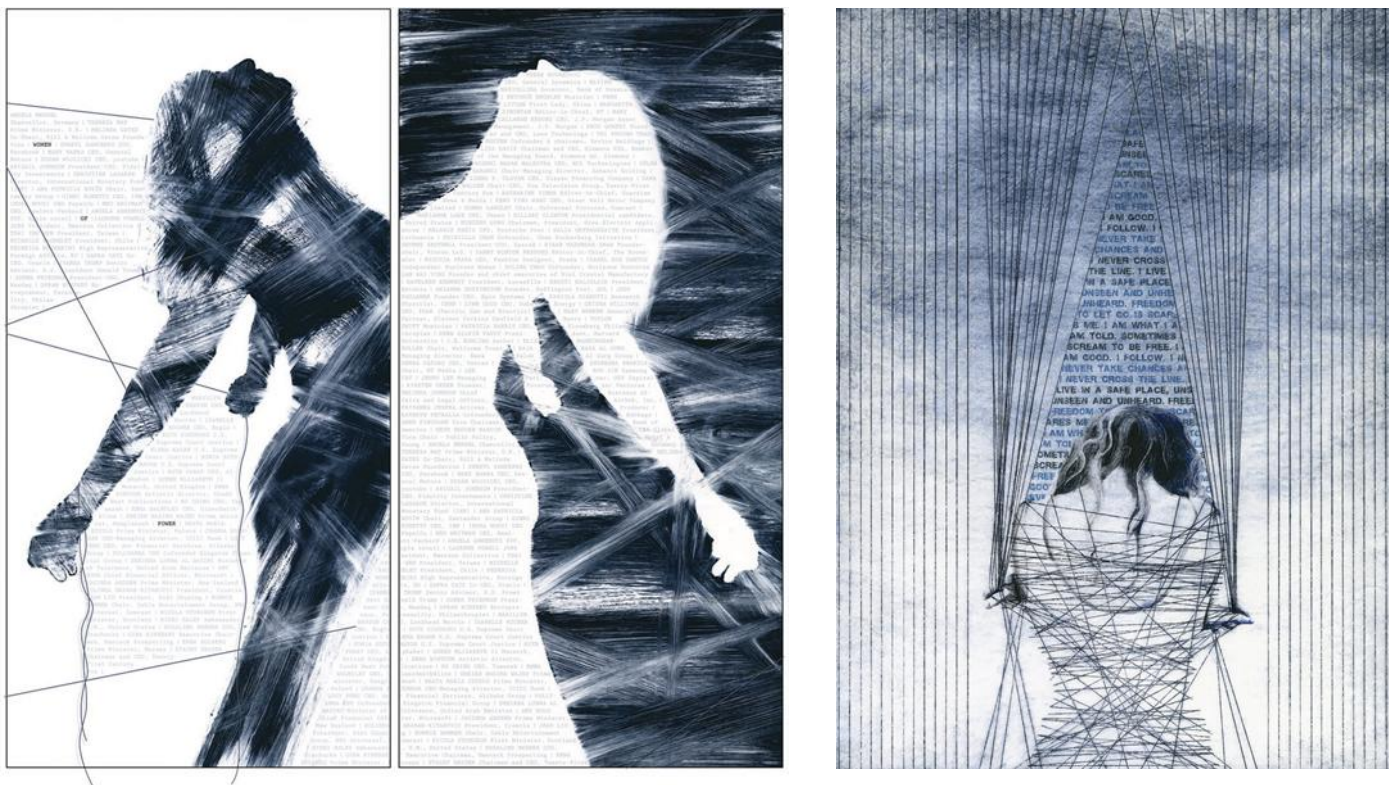
*Bez tytułu 2*, from the *Exercises* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2017

*Works*, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 9 plates, years vary

*Bez tytułu 1*, from the *Exercises* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2016

*Bez tytułu 1*, from the *Number* series, silkscreen on sugar plates using chocolate ink, 8" x 12", 2018





## BETWEEN IMAGE AND TEXT

### Rozanne Hermelyn Di Silvestro

I couldn't breathe in my youth. The weight of expectations felt unbearable as they crushed my dreams and aspirations before they even started. The pressure kept building as my source of distress expanded through the years as I grew up in a consumerist culture obsessed with body image and perfectionism. It was a defining moment in my life when I finally chose to break away and pursue an unknown path, rather than agree to follow one that was safe and prescribed. These memories and feelings were the inspiration for my *Strings* series and marked the first time I combined words and images in my fine art.

Since my educational focus was design, I naturally integrate it into the artistic process of my mixed media prints. Typography and imagery are principal design elements in corporate communication. As a designer, I combine these to express a distinct visual message to solve a given problem. As an artist, I work towards self-expression and interpretation to start a conversation. As a result, my fine art lives within a blurred line between both disciplines, and printmaking is the natural bridge combining both creative worlds.

With my love for typography, it is not surprising that I began to marry type, image and concept within my art. In design I know that the written word communicates beyond its content, so I asked myself, why not within fine art? By reconsidering letterforms, single words, fragmented sentences and text blocks, I began adding visual language into my compositions as a supporting or primary character.

By orchestrating features and layouts, type began to express emotions, sounds, gestures, forms and textures.

Through incorporating words in my work I continue on a path of challenging the norm, ignoring the rules of how others view "image," to redefine the meaning of "word" by adding a visual voice. My *Strings* series images, *Safe Place* and *Possibilities*, speak to the struggle of choice and are examples of how image and words can play an equal role in the narrative. The self-reflective poem, *Safe Place*, forms a solid typographic block that visually expresses the heavy weight of the unknown and the pressures to conform; burdens that are carried upon the shoulders of the figure. In contrast, the poem in *Possibilities* alludes to the positive inner voice, pushing the figure forward toward what is possible.

In my *Waiting* series, *Waiting for the Water to Rise* and *Sinking Subsidence* present the written word as a second primary character. Both prints display a word list that reveal distressing facts of global warming and climate change while rendering the objects at risk. The facts in *Waiting for the Water to Rise* create a typographic barrage of the earth's cries. Type falls like tears from an umbrella, parallel to a fading human form. Composed of over fifty percent water, the figure's body becomes a visual metaphor for the expected loss of life from lack of water resources. In *Sinking Subsidence*, the words are a running list of water-intensive goods and products with the largest water footprint. They visually form a drought-induced sinkhole, the result of unsustainable water extraction from underground aquifers, which often cause long-term permanent damage. This series speaks to



the overwhelming passive response to confronting global warming. While many individuals seemingly acknowledge the record changes in climate, the increase in ocean surface temperatures, and the rise of sea levels, they continue to wait, immobilized, for change to occur.

Along with my love of typography, I have a special romance with monotype printmaking. I continue to return to the technique over and over again. Some say the monotype technique “liberated” Degas; I also feel as though it has liberated me. Monotypes are limited to an edition of one and straddle the fields of printmaking and painting. The technique allows my work to transform by freeing my mark making to endless exploration and possibilities of abstraction. Each movement and emotion of every mark I make is recorded so there is no hiding once I start. The uncomfortable space is enlightening and very addicting. I draw and paint freely on a smooth plate by adding and subtracting oil inks and then printing the image onto damp paper using an etching press. I find the monotype image combined with typography creates symmetry and harmony in giving voice to a visual message. One I create by hand and the other by a computer. Together, the painted image and written word reflect the marriage between humanity and technology, mirroring today’s culture. Most importantly, the unique textural quality captures and reveals the vulnerability and emotion of both subject and artist, offering a message on a more intimate level, while welcoming a conversation. The natural and imperfect impressions help create a comfortable space to connect and consider the social issues of my work.

*Bound* is a print from my current series, *Private Revolution*. Discouraged by current world news and inspired to make a difference for my daughter, I created this image to whisper a list of the most powerful women today. Their names and titles become the textural pattern and fabric of a suggested dress that the figure has left behind. The featureless body challenges the viewer to set aside judgment and to view self differently. The box shape implies containment and symbolizes imposed limitations. By breaking through the border, the figure successfully begins to tear down those walls built to define our differences and to divide us as human beings. Although women continue to be bound by gender, caste, creed and nation, many have broken through barriers to obtain leadership positions in industry, academics and government. The *Forbes*’ list of the “100 Most Powerful Women” underscores this advancement. My hope is to inspire a new generation of women to continue moving towards what is fully possible.

I broke through some barriers of my own in design as part of the first generation of working creatives who used computers as their “new pencil.” My first job out of art school was with the first design firm in the country to incorporate desktop computers into the creative process, from concept through print production and fabrication. Today, I still use these digital tools in similar ways to produce my mixed media prints. The computer gives me the creative freedom to explore the infinite possibilities of idea, design and typography. Beginning with research notes and concept sketches, I scan my ideas, upload them into various graphic programs, and then begin to play. From there I usually jump into creating my monotype imagery and then explore, compose and layer typographic solutions. My visual message is always considered during my decision-making process, where I examine every element, color, form and composition for what they communicate. I usually create what designers call a “comp,” short for a comprehensive layout, of the final image before proceeding. This helps me to combine and register the multiple hand-painted and typographic layers, avoiding major mistakes but still allowing unexpected surprises.

With image and text, through printmaking or digital tools, art is my voice and my release to express what concerns me. For years I have worked with the curatorial group, Gutfreund Cornett Art, promoting their U.S. exhibitions on themes of “art as activism.” Their mission is to *Change the World Through Art*. I have also worked with the national branch of Women’s Caucus for Arts, who are committed to supporting local, national and global art activism and advocating for equity in the arts for all. I support these organizations and participate in selected juried exhibitions that specifically address and help raise public awareness of social and political issues that I passionately care about. By exposing connections and struggles between self, society and nature, I aspire to move the viewer’s perception from seeing to understanding, creating a personal link to affect positive change.





## Artist Information

Since Rozanne Hermelyn Di Silvestro can remember, she has painted, drawn and followed her passion for the arts. After growing up in the Los Angeles, Rozanne attended UCLA and Art Center College of Design, receiving a BA in design and BFA in graphic and package design with distinction. Rozanne moved to San Francisco to begin her career and within 5 years became owner of Arc & Line Communications and taught classes at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. After twenty years of a successful design business, Rozanne transitioned toward her first love of fine art. Her artwork was awarded Best of Show in the *Yosemite Renaissance XXIII* exhibit, Best of Show in *Politics (Not) as Usual* exhibit, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the *Pacific Prints* exhibits, and 1<sup>st</sup> place in the *Beyond Cancer* exhibit. Rozanne's work was also selected into the permanent collection of the Library of Congress, Charles Krause Reporting Fine Art in Washington D.C. and Bank Street Arts Gallery in the U.K.

hermelyn.com

## Image Documentation

*Bound*, Monotype, Screenprint & Strings, 48" x 48", 2018

*Safe Place*, Monotype, Dry Point & Digital Transfer, 23.5" x 17.5", 2015

*Waiting for the Water to Rise*, Monotype & Digital Transfer, 23.5" x 17.5", 2015

*Sinking, Subsidence*, Monotype & Digital Transfer, 30" x 22", 2016

*Possibilities*, Monotype, Dry Point & Digital Transfer, 23.5" x 17.5", 2015

*Between the Lies 1*, Monotype & Screenprint, 30" x 24", 2018





## HOW POLITICS IMPACT PRINTMAKING— ONE CENTRAL VALLEY PERSPECTIVE

### Jared Barbick

As an artist, politics has played a vital part in my work. I had gone on a trip to North Ireland and became fascinated by the conflict that still exists between those who align with Britain and those who wish to be a free and independent Ireland. As an educator, I noted how all of the violence, along with the artistic murals representing it, impacted the youth who live there. Later I saw a documentary where one of the muralists, when referring to the violent images kids see in North Ireland, noted that we must be careful what kind of monsters we mold. That sparked a thought that related to the existing issues within America during the Trump election/victory. I then took images that I thought conveyed the message, starting with the girl playing with Klansman toys on the bed. The work *Molding Monsters*, addresses how the media, Twitter, YouTube, Trump, radio music and family, can inundate children with the wrong message leading to what we see. A child of no identifiable race plays with Klansmen amongst old room decor symbolizing arcane attitudes in a contemporary world. Recently I was in a heavy debate with friends about the prison system, its effectiveness in rehabilitating, how the public perceives inmates and the impact incarceration has on families and attitudes. That led to *Visiting Day & First Steps Together*, a woodblock print on washi paper. It was designed to illustrate an inmate of no discernible gender taking their first steps with their child, also of no clear gender. The goal was to get people to have a discussion about the event

in the work. The public's first response to this image was melancholy and depression. I had simply asked, "But what about the positive side? What about the fact that this parent, in lieu of circumstances, is there, is present and is taking those first steps with their child? Isn't this a testament to this parent's dedication and effort?" I continue to hope this image challenges how we interpret what we see.

Not only am I interested in the social stressors on people, but as an animal activist I also focus on the threats to animals and the environment. My animal related woodblock prints are designed to address a current issue and educate people. *Relocation of the Last Polar Bears & Escort*, on MDF block, addresses the melting ice caps and man's desire to drill at all costs, as well as the potential negative impact on the polar bear. I attempt to soften the message by immersing it in a surrealist design where the wolf coachman transports the polar bear mother and cub in basket, and the orca pass through, while the pipeline breaks the sky. All the while an isolated iceberg sails by.

As a kid I grew up in a society where furs made of real animal hair became highly controversial and led to organizations standing out in front of stores and pouring paint on patrons who bought these items. These events were part of a greater movement to ban seal hunting or at least, provide some limits to the practice. Sadly the laws passed didn't hold up and in the last 20 years have been almost totally reversed, thus prompting the killing of hundreds of thousands of seals annually. But this is not our focus as a society right now, so I thought I'd do a work bringing it to the public. *The Executioner, the Seal, & the Magician* addresses the baby seal hunting industry. The seal hunter





stands, a knife in each hand, ready to kill the ragged jacket seal. Meanwhile the American public stands by distracted by their phones, while a magician attempts to distract us from what's happening. An unknown hand enters to save the seal and snatch the executioner as the seal looks to us, the viewer, for help.

In printmaking, I usually use MDF wood or Mahogany. MDF is rigid enough to hold crisp lines, endure high pressure turns of the blade, and doesn't rip like wood. There is no grain to fight against most of the time, and it works well for high definition works. The problem is that it is not practical to easily clean for reductions, and breaks down with exposure to certain amounts of liquid. This creates limitations for the medium and the body of work. If you look at the works *The Executioner*, *the Seal & the Executioner*, *True Friends*, and *Molding Monsters*, you can see tight, long line work as well as great clarity on curves, yielding nice detail for small fine tick markings. In cases where the MDF is fabricated differently there can be grainlines that drastically impact the art, as seen in the print *Relocation of the Last Polar Bears & Escort*, on the orcas.

Mahogany is beautiful and tight grained, holds a line well but requires attention to each millimeter of detail, as it will rip if you go with the grain too aggressively. It is a hard wood and does not cut easily, often causing the blade to skip as you cut across the wood. You can use the grain to your advantage. In *Visiting Day & First Steps Together* you can see how the placement of the image made all the difference. The grain's natural curves glide and twist under the feet like flooring and disappears into the background.

For tools I use Power Grip block cutting five packs, honing compound from McClains, Flexcut SlipStrop and Swiss made cutting tools from Woodcraft. My press is a custom made Monotype Conrad Press. My studio area has my inking table, a modified tilting cutting station, a flat file system and very small drying rack. I use the V-gouge and U-gouge and almost never use the Hangi To or chisels. I

use magnification specs for working so that I can honour my lines and not improvise as much in correction work. For long line work I lay my head down, resting my hand on my cheek, and use my whole body to move forward in one long line. This minimizes latitudinal drift of the blade during the cut.

My editions run from five, and never more than ten. I want my work to stay collectable and limited, but as exact from print to print as I can. I do not force more.

As a relatively new printmaker, but not new artist, my process always starts with finding images that are inspiring. Inspiration does not have to be happy thoughts or cuddly pictures. Mine are drawn from interactions people have, human rights violations, acts of humanity that define us, animal conservation and feats of great struggle that require some element of extreme effort to overcome. What I feel, believe, and think is integral to each work. I try to construct a narrative in each image to tell a particular story or to convey a particular feeling and set of thoughts, reflecting my inner landscape.

### Artist Information

Jared M. Barbick, born in 1976, was raised in Palos Verdes, a picturesque seaside town in Southern California. Educated at both the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and self-taught, Barbick's work has traversed various mediums and subjects over the years as he moved from Southern California to Minneapolis, Minnesota and back, where he has made a home for the last 10 years in the central valley—Fresno—with his wife and 2 cats.

[www.jmbart.org](http://www.jmbart.org)

### Image Documentation

*Molding Monsters*, woodcut, 22"x15", 2017

*The Executioner, the Seal, & the Magician*, woodcut, 22"x22", 2017

*Visiting Day & First Steps Together*, woodblock print on Washi, 11"x22", 2018

*Relocation of the Last Polar Bears & Escort*, woodcut, 37"x24", 2018



## PRINTMAKING AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

**Lars Johnson**

*I want to use my art as a weapon.*—Diego Rivera

Artists have long used their mediums as vehicles for social and political comment, and printmakers are no exception. By examining the work of three artists from the past we may gauge their influence and relevance to today's milieu.

A modern example of politicized printmaking came out of German Expressionism, and certainly one of its most influential artists was Kathe Kollwitz (1867–1945). Born in 1867 in East Prussia as Kathe Schmidt, Kollwitz was influenced almost immediately by her working class father and grandfather's socialist beliefs. Kollwitz's father was a stonemason and house builder who developed a strong social conscience after reading the works of Karl Marx.

Kollwitz exercised her natural talent early by drawing what she was immediately exposed to: workers. Unfortunately the chauvinistic social climate of the time prevented her from entering the National Art Academy in Berlin, so at 16 she enrolled in a Berlin woman's art school and later at the Women's Art College in Munich. During this period she was influenced by the work of Max Klinger, an artist of the naturalist school.

In 1884 she married Karl Kollwitz, a Berlin doctor who devoted his practice to serving the poor and laborer class. She began drawing common laborers, and this remained a subject she would return to with regularity for her entire career. Her first major cycle of six prints (three lithographs



and three aquatint etchings) was titled *The Weavers*, based on a 1844 weavers' uprising against unfair working conditions in Silesia, Prussia. Karl Marx cited this incident of brutal suppression, during which the army killed and wounded members of a crowd of demonstrators, as the birth of the German Workers Movement. This cycle of work, well received publically, was nominated for a gold medal but vetoed by Kaiser Wilhelm II as having "socialist sympathies."

From 1901–1908, Kollwitz produced her next major cycle of seven etchings, *Peasant War*, depicting the 1524–25 German Peasants' uprising against brutal working conditions. As the fifth in this cycle, Kollwitz produced the 1903 etching *Outbreak* which she clearly created as a metaphor for her time in pre WWI Germany. Most evocative in *Outbreak* is the figure of Black Anna, a pre-feminist icon, exhorting the armed masses onward. Through her use of etching, aquatint and soft ground, Kollwitz used cloth to create texture as she ran the plate through the press. Through these prints, Kollwitz continually championed the working class and illustrated issues of social justice across history.

In 1919 Kollwitz became the first woman elected to a full professorship at the Prussian Academy of Arts. She was associated with the progressive journal *Simplicissimus* and became a national figure in the art world. Tragically, she lost a son in World War I.

Like so many German artists of the time, after 1933 her work was suppressed by the rise of National Socialism (Nazism). She was among those featured in the notorious



*Degenerate Art* exhibit of 1933. Her national prominence probably kept her alive during this dark period, however she lost her post at the Academy because of her political associations. Sadly, Kathe Kollwitz died just weeks before the end of World War II in April 1945. Her work remains as fresh today as when it was produced as a reflection on workers' rights and social justice.

Provocateur, pragmatist, polemicist and propagandist; certainly a more enigmatic figure of German Expressionism is that of Wilhelm Rudolph (1889–1982). Living almost his entire life in Dresden Germany, he produced over 700 woodcuts and etchings during his long career. Artists like Rudolph have often used not only metaphorical images, but additionally inflammatory ones, sometimes as outright ideological propaganda. An example of his early work from 1924 was a woodcut that may have been intended for a handbill *Help the Work of the IAH*. The IAH was a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, absorbed by the Communist Party sometime after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. A dedicated communist, Rudolph curiously briefly joined the NSDAP (Nazi) party but resigned after discovering it to be less socialist than he envisioned. What motivated this move from socialist to fascist and ultimately back to socialist remains unknown.

The stark woodcuts of the 1900s though 1920s gave way to softer more bucolic etchings featuring woodland scenes. He enjoyed some success with these, and he was appointed a lecturer at the Dresden Art Academy until running afoul of the Nazi Party. He, along with expressionist artist and former Nazi party member Emil Nolde, was featured in Hitler's *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich 1933.

Fired from his post as lecturer at the Academy, he managed to eke out a living as a freelance artist during the war.

A seminal event changed the life and art of Wilhelm Rudolph on February 13 and 14, 1945 with the firebombing and almost complete destruction of Dresden by the Allies. Rudolph's studio was destroyed along with most of his life's work, including over 200 double sided woodblocks. Rudolph spent the next several years drawing and then making prints, mostly woodcuts, depicting a destruction so devastating that it was likened to Hiroshima. Although created for the purpose of illustrating the horror and futility of war in general, Rudolph's work was often featured by government propagandists as an illustration of the depredations visited on Dresden by the Western Allies during WWII. Dresden was partitioned into what was then East Germany during the division of Germany by the Allies: Britain, France, United States and Russia. Despite his strong leftist credentials, Rudolf found himself at cross purposes with the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Communist Party. Perhaps it was due to his brief flirtation with the Nazis prior to WWII. Wilhelm's woodcut *The End* portrays an image of a man alone on a park bench disconsolate, a clearly nihilistic portrait of life in the GDR in 1950.

After the war, Rudolph returned to the Dresden Art Academy as a lecturer. However he never achieved the acclaim he was due and is most remembered for his "rubble paintings" depicting the total destruction of Dresden. For close to 20 years, woodcuts of the destruction and rebuilding of Dresden dominated his work. He ended his career as the ultimate propagandist, creating large painted portraits of communist party apparatchiks including Walter Ulbricht, the head of the Communist Party and chancellor of the GDR from 1949–1971.

Skeletons and skulls have been used in artist imagery almost forever, but none have used *calaveras* (skeletons) to greater and more influential effect than Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). Born to a working class family in Aguascaliente, Mexico, as a child Posada worked as a farm laborer and in a pottery factory. He received formal training in drawing at the local Academy of Art and in 1868 apprenticed as a lithographer in the workshop of Jose Trinidad Pedroza. In 1872 he moved to Leon, Mexico with Pedroza's workshop. A year later Pedroza left Leon and returned to Aguascaliente, leaving Posada in charge of the workshop where he continued to produce lithographs and engravings that were often comments on the social or political issues of the day for commercial publication.

In 1888 a flood damaged Posada's workshop in Leon and he moved his workshop to Mexico City where previously he had started to develop relationships with several publishers. By 1889 he began working for the publishing house of Antonio Venegas Arroyo whose publications were distributed throughout Mexico and even to border regions of the United States where there might be Latino residents. It is thought that Arroyo hired Posada in order to reach a predominantly illiterate public by enhancing Arroyo's publications with graphic images. In 1910 Posada created a calavera for a leaflet entitled *La Calavera Garbancera*, describing a woman, who, ashamed of her Indian origins, began wearing French clothing and using makeup to whiten her skin. Later, in 1948, this character was dubbed *La Catrina* by none other than Diego Rivera and made famous in his mural *Sunday Evening's Dream*. Rivera considered Posada one of his prime influences and together they made *La Catrina* one of Mexico's most iconic images.

In a true sense, Posada was an artist of the people, portraying life and political satire of the society around him on daily broadsheets often sold publicly in markets. Posada remained a constant social critic and satirist throughout his prolific artistic life. Posada's *calaveras* have become universally recognized in modern Latino culture, specifically in relation to *La Dia de los Muertos*.

In examining the life and work of these three artists we can appreciate the sentiments of Diego Rivera as quoted at the beginning of this article: "I want to use my art as a weapon." All three, Kollwitz, Rudolph and Posada, used printmaking throughout their careers to try to shape public opinion. We, as today's printmakers, should do no less.



## Sources

Kathe Kollwitz:

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Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Courtney Rogers 2017, special thanks to Director P. Earenfight.

Wilhelm Rudolph:

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José Guadalupe Posada:

*Mexico, A Revolution In Art 1910–1940*, Adrian Locke, 2013 Royal Academy of Arts, London

Posada Art Foundation, *About Posada*, Jim Nikas, June 2014

*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2018

Diego Rivera quote: [artnet.com/artists/diego-rivera](http://artnet.com/artists/diego-rivera)

## Image Documentation

With special thanks to Johannes Schmidt, director of the Stadtische Galerie Dresden for the Rudolph images.

Kollwitz, *Outbreak*, etching, aquatint, soft ground, 1903, courtesy of the British Museum

Rudolph, *The End*, woodcut, 1946–48, courtesy of Stadtische Galerie Dresden

Rudolph, *Murder*, woodcut, 1946–48, courtesy of Stadtische Galerie Dresden

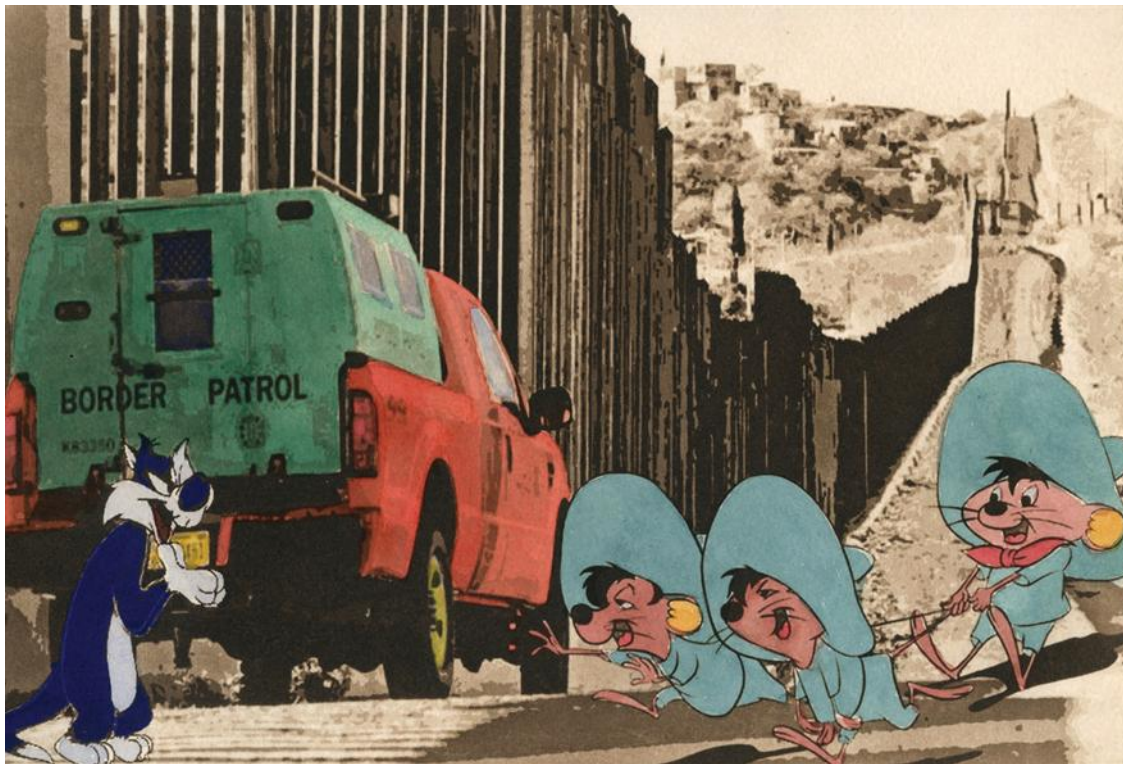
José Guadalupe Posada, *Gran Calavera Electricia*, relief etching, 8.4" x 13.3", before 1913, Library of Congress public domain

## Writer's Information

Lars Johnson is a San Francisco printmaker, painter and musician. His studio is in the Hunters Point Shipyard. He has been a member of The California Society of Printmakers since 1978.

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## CHICANO HYBRIDITY

**Tony Ortega**

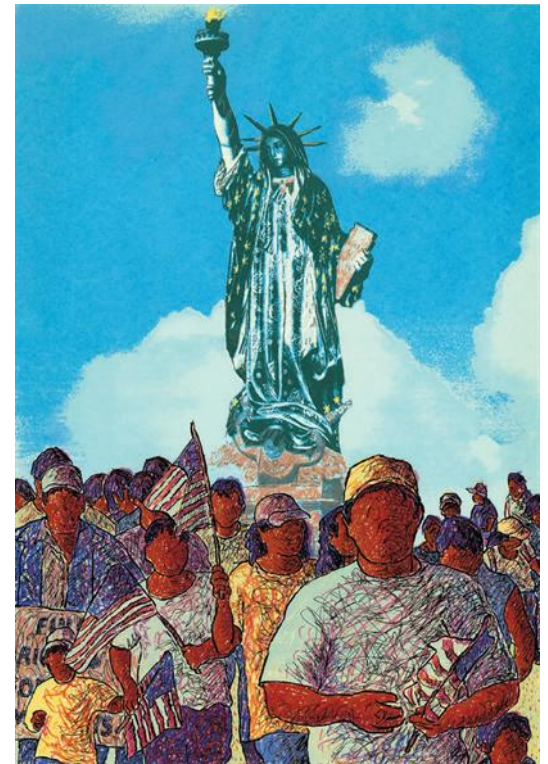
I wake up every morning in northwest Denver where I physically, emotionally and spiritually experience the clash of two cultures, one Mexican and the other, American. This is my daily dilemma... I cross a border that is not the physical Mexican/U.S. border created for the separation of two nation states, but rather a psychological border that is every bit as real, a border between two cultures. Here in northwest Denver, the northern frontier of Aztlan and an outpost of Latin Americans, mine is a journey from north to south. In contrast, I am daily immersed in a dominant culture whose history is from east to west. On this personal journey, I need to change my thinking from Spanish to English, from a feeling of community to one of capitalism, and from family to individual and then back again. And yet my journey is not unique. It is a daily journey for many of my fellow Latinos.

The demographics of this country are changing as its Latino population increases. The border as we know it is truly in flux and no longer exists just at El Paso, Juarez, San Diego or Tijuana. The border is clearly evident here in Denver as well as in Los Angeles and in Phoenix. Cultures and languages mutually interact and affect one another. The United States continuously receives sizeable human migrations, a result of multiple factors that include unemployment, overpopulation and disparity in wealth. Art is a very important aspect of culture in all societies and it has changed so as to give a visual image of this

cultural convergence. This is clearly evident in what we know as Chicano art, a tradition with a very brief history which developed as a result of the civil rights movement of the late 1960s and 70s. Drawing from Mexican and American art, it is a community based art form that expresses the experiences, thoughts, feelings and aspirations of the Chicano community, diverse in ideology and with a common history. The Chicano Movement was born from disappointment, an inner need and a fight for basic human, civil and cultural rights of an ignored and marginalized people. This reflects the cultural expressions of Mexican Americans who have made significant cultural, political and artistic influences to the American culture. The Chicano experience is not an isolated phenomenon but an active, integral part of American society. It is a combination of two histories, two legacies that meet to create something new.

My artwork began in 1982 as part of the Chicano movement after I completed art school, and I began creating art based on my experience as a Chicano. I was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico and grew up in Denver, Colorado. As a child I traveled between these two locations with my maternal grandmother who educated and grounded me in culture, traditions and a sense of place. These travels also made me aware of being a bilingual, bicultural person. She helped me define and understand my personal and cultural identity.

My art reflects a cultural and historical confluence or hybridity. For me, hybridity is a process that crosses two separate cultures. It is a constant process of negotiation between different cultural groups, a form of intercultural



dialogue. Hybridity can be viewed as the space where communication between cultures takes place.

From the beginning of the Chicano movement, printmaking has played an integral role. Some of its inspiration came from printmaking traditions in Mexico. A good example is the artwork of Jose Guadalupe Posada who used parody and humor in portraying the routines of the upper and peasant classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Chicano artists rediscovered Posada and have portrayed him as the hero and father of Mexican printmaking. I, too, see Posada as an inspiration in my use of parody and humor in my printmaking work.

The most comprehensive prints I have created recently have been images addressing cultural hybridity. As a Chicano artist, my identity, as well as my cultural and geographic backgrounds are integral in my art. For many Chicano artists, our experiences and cultural hybridity address the distinctions between the worlds we experience and how they combine to form our identity. With art, I can address the differences in my world, forming a new and more accurate personal and cultural identity.

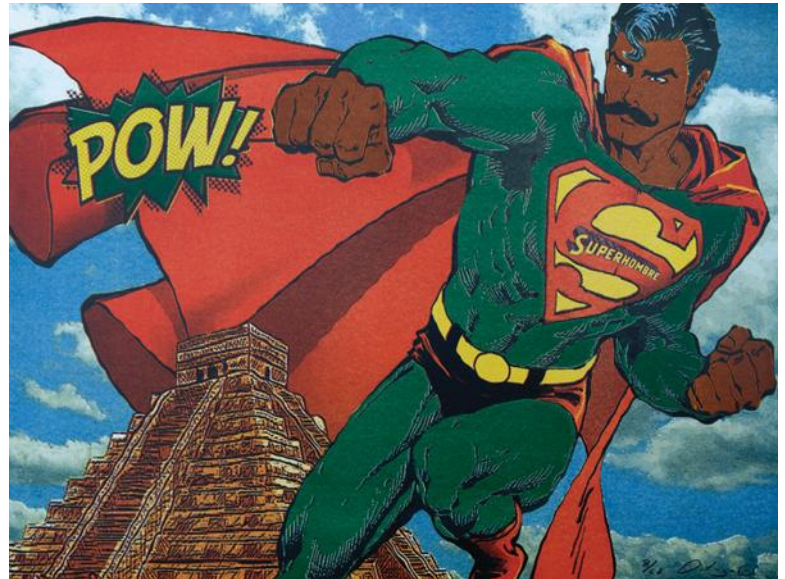
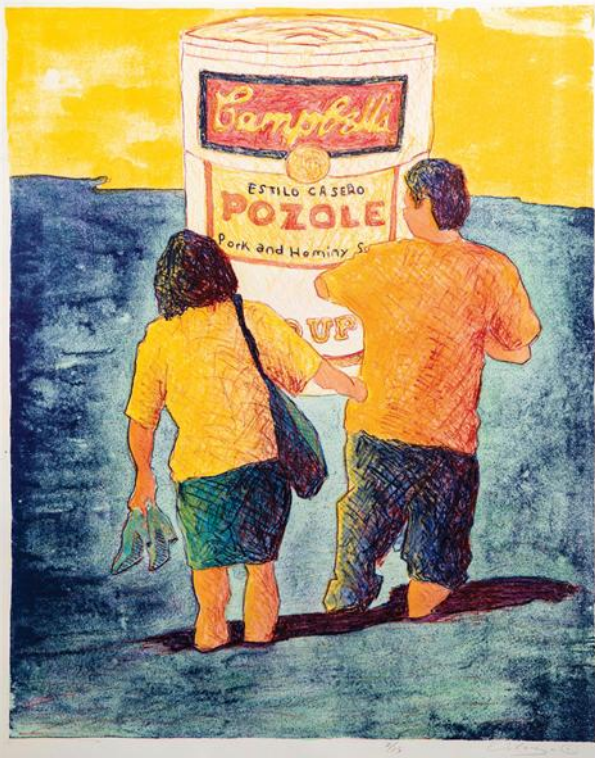
This bicultural encounter has influenced my life, my art and my prints. As a printmaker, I create art by combining drawing and traditional printmaking techniques with digital technology. I use Adobe Photoshop to merge a variety of images into a composition. Both the practices of printmaking and working in Photoshop involve working in layers and separations, a natural mix for me. Working with and responding to new technologies involving the hybridization of physical and digital elements have become

an integral part of my prints. With the results of these varied processes, I create film positives which I expose onto a variety of matrices using printmaking techniques that include lithography, solar polymer etching and silkscreen.

Distortion and exaggeration for emotional effect are significant in my art. I apply vivid and dynamic color, overlapping transparent color with opaque color, and combining flat space with cubical space. I interweave western concepts of perspective, light/shadow, and overlapping of shapes with the indigenous folk art design of simplified geometric shapes, brilliant pastel colors, and inviting temperature thereby creating a harmonious composition. I merge abstraction, simplification, and realism, juxtaposing and superimposing unlikely images from American and Mexican cultures that include realism, icons, symbols, humor and fantasy, art history and the contemporary world. This technique fosters opportunities for the bending of meaning.

An important day in U.S. history was May 1, 2006 as ten million immigrants, activists and allies in over 200 American cities chose to skip work, school, and their normal daily routine to participate in *A Day Without Immigrants*. A national boycott, general strikes, rallies and symbolic actions were held in order to demand basic rights for all immigrants, and to foster a new multi-ethnic, united civil rights movement. In *La Marcha de Lupe Liberty*, I combine two female images with the May 1, 2006 national rally. I use the Statue of Liberty, one of the most recognizable icons of America, to represent liberty and the escape from oppression. I also used Our Lady of





Guadalupe, a Catholic icon and Mexico's most popular image. Guadalupe's importance continues today, providing Latinos a positive model of ideal self, of nurturing as well as of family and community devotion.

In *Super Hombre* I turned Superman into a brown Mexican hero, changing the colors of his superhero's suit from red, white and blue, the colors of the American flag, to red, white and green, the colors of the Mexican flag. This superman leaps over pyramids in a single bound rather than leaping over skyscrapers. And, yes, he also proudly shows off his manly macho mustache.

*English Only U.S. Map* is a parody of the famous Jasper Johns painting *Map*. In the early 1990s, English was declared the official language of Colorado and many other states. In my version of the U.S. map, I changed the names of states and places that are in Spanish to their English counterparts. As an objection to this new law/declaration, I satirically and humorously re-contextualized the new names of the states.

*Pozole Crossing* is a both parody of the famous Andy Warhol artwork *Campbell Soup Cans* and a comment on immigration. The print shows a couple crossing the Rio Grande in pursuit of the American dream, a can of Campbell's soup. Fortunately for us, Campbell's doesn't make canned *pozole*. Perhaps that will change.

I believe artists have a responsibility to include the social concerns around them with artwork that depicts culture, social injustice, human rights, environmental degradation and political power. Artists have created artwork as extensions of their caring hearts and concerned minds to

explore the aesthetics and ethics of interconnectedness and social responsibility. As a printmaker I use parody and humor to create art works that comment on the changing demographics and culture in the United States and its changing culture. Hopefully, these images inspire new insights into our society.

### Artist Information

Tony Ortega holds an MFA in drawing and painting from the University of Colorado and is currently a full professor for Regis University. He is the recipient of the coveted Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts (1999) and the Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts (1998). He has been a working artist and teacher for the past 36 years. Tony Ortega's lifelong goal is to contribute to a better understanding of cultural diversity by addressing the culture, history and experiences of Chicanos/Latinos through his art. His work can be found in the Denver Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum and the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center. He has exhibited extensively in the U.S., Latin America and other parts of the world. Tony's artwork can be found in Denver, Colorado at the William Havu Gallery.

[tonyortega.net](http://tonyortega.net)

### Image Documentation

*Speedy at the Border*, hand colored polymer etching, 8" x 10", 2017

*Official English Only U.S. Map*, lithograph, 10" x 14.75", 2014

*La Marcha de Lupe Liberty*, silkscreen, 23" x 16", 2006

*Pozole Crossing*, Lithograph, 20" x 16", 2013

*Super Hombre*, lithograph, 15" x 20", 2015





## TRANSFORMING PRINTMAKING: FROM SELF-REFORM TO SOCIAL CHANGE

**Yasuyo Tanaka**

My desire to create art comes from my search for the meaning of our existence.

The creative process is a key that I use to understand others, myself and the world. The most precious thing in my life is the quest for truth, which is often hidden behind society's accepted ideas. I train my mind's eye to make visible the invisible in order to explore the truth in my work. Art is my guide and mentor. In subtle yet profound ways, my work answers questions that I have previously posed.

In 1994, I first became involved in the lives of two countries, Japan and the United States. As a recent Japanese immigrant, my perspective has changed gradually. The historical and geographical backgrounds of the United States and Japan have deeply influenced my work. In particular, the relationship between Japan, in which atomic bombs were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the first time in actual war, and the United States, which produced and used the first nuclear weapons by the Manhattan Project, has been my chief concern.

Living in the melting pot of New York City, I noticed the necessity for owning many keys as one of the major differences between Japan and the United States. I thought it seemed to reflect the heightened security concerns of a country of immigrants, and the expansion of the gap between rich and poor. Keys are symbolic images, evoking

many themes, which stimulate me. I found diverse designs of keys from many countries. This variety of keys, to me, resembles people of different races, languages, cultures and values.

Everybody is born with a key for finding purpose in their life. Based on this concept, I collected discarded keys to make 365 etching plates of different keys and backgrounds using soft ground and deep etching techniques. These 365 key plates imply our birthdays and daily lives. I created 365 white embossed card-sized prints to express the existence of invisible keys in our minds. The process of creating the 365 key prints was to understand differences between human beings. This drove my inner transformation from simply being Japanese to becoming a world citizen. This work entitled *My Key* built my foundation. I perceived the existence of my key and my true life began.

2011 became an unforgettable year for me when the Fukushima nuclear accident occurred in Japan. It was also the year in which my project *In Search for the Meaning of Our Lives* was realized at the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. I was particularly interested in the keys Palestinian refugees brought from their homeland.

As part of the Nakba Day's memorial event, I held my exhibitions, workshops and artist talks at the Palestinian refugee camps and at Zico House in Beirut. There is an invisible wall between Palestinians and Lebanese. While considering who lost their families and homes through the Fukushima nuclear disaster, I held workshops to make family albums at refugee camps with Palestinian families and Lebanese families. This project aimed to provide a





chance for Palestinians and Lebanese to interact with and understand more about each other. I wanted to share moments in the search for the meaning of our lives through “key.” It ended up teaching me the meaning of my own life.

Since the Fukushima nuclear accident, nuclear issues have become an important theme in my work, partly because my family was directly affected by the disaster. In 2012, my hometown Yaita City became the first candidate as the final disposal site for radioactive waste. There was a strong opposition movement by locals, which caused the site to be changed to the neighboring town of Shioya. My parents’ home is almost the same distance from both of the candidate sites, which are state-owned forests. The spring water of Shioya town, which flows to Yaita and Tokyo, was chosen as one of the 100 best waters in Japan. Transferring the waste disposal site to Shioya Town does not solve the problem, although some of Yaita’s residents think the problem is solved. Therefore, I wanted to create opportunities for locals of Yaita City and Shioya Town to interact.

In 2016, I held two solo exhibitions: *What is Home?* in Yaita City and *Where is Home?* in Shioya Town, as part of the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The Yaita City exhibition was the first in my hometown, and was blessed with a lot of viewers. The theme of “home” caught the interest of many people. The Fukushima disaster area’s victims, whom I met when I visited their temporary housing at Souma City in 2015, came to see my exhibition, participated in the talk event with locals, and shared their experiences with the audience. Their visit supported the

movement against the construction of a final disposal site for nuclear waste in Shioya Town and encouraged locals. Through this exhibition, I got acquainted with residents who are serious about environmental issues.

My home prefecture, Tochigi, was the location of the environmental destruction that occurred during the Ashio Copper Mine Incident of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as being the birthplace of Shōzō Tanaka (1841–1913), the first conservationist in Japan. Tanaka fought for environmental conservation and human rights alongside local residents and miners. Ichiro Koguchi (1914–1979) was a printmaker from Oyama City, Tochigi Prefecture. He created a series of woodblock prints titled *People Who Shout At the Field*, to convey the history of the Ashio Copper Mine Incident.

Koguchi related the history of a severe refugee crisis in the settlement in Saroma Town, Hokkaido, by villagers from Yanaka, which became a compulsory waste village due to mineral poisoning. Koguchi visited Saroma Town many times, and carefully interviewed settlers, recording their harsh memories and feelings. Koguchi’s work portrayed the desire of these villagers, who had been forced away from their hometown, to return. Using his research materials, he negotiated with the governor to respond to the settlers’ petitions and complaints, and supported the homecoming movement of the 1970s. Through his work, he tried to investigate this unknown history and to convey its truth. His printmaking affected both politics and society.

The town of Ashio experienced both prosperity and decline because of its copper mine. I felt the situation in Ashio



Town to be similar to the radioactively contaminated evacuation area in Fukushima. As if it were a prediction of our future, the houses in Ashio town where no one lives are ruined and time seems to have stopped. Nature in Ashio Town, which was destroyed more than 100 years ago, has not yet recovered. I began thinking about how to express the connection between the past and the future.

In 2017, Koguchi's prints and my prints were exhibited together at environmental festivals in Tochigi, Japan. It was a two-person exhibition showing our different styles, though sharing similar political, social and environmental themes. While working with locals, I learned about the origins of Japanese public pollution and about a printmaker, Ichiro Koguchi, that I had never learned about in school. The works of Koguchi taught me that the printmaking history of Tochigi Prefecture had been deeply involved in social and political issues. The life of Koguchi as a printmaker inspired me and encouraged my work. The experience of the environmental festival, held in my home country, urged me to recognize my identity, and made me conscious of how my work was rooted in my homeland.

My works at environmental festivals were based on the nuclear issue. *All Things Are Linked: Hotspots* presents the theme of radioactive contamination around the world. In the beginning, Earth had no national borders. By using an outline of the world map shape, I made a white embossed map. Folded-paper cranes are presented as symbols of peace and hope. I folded a part of the world map to make paper cranes, and attached these to the embossed world map in places where nuclear power plant accidents had occurred;

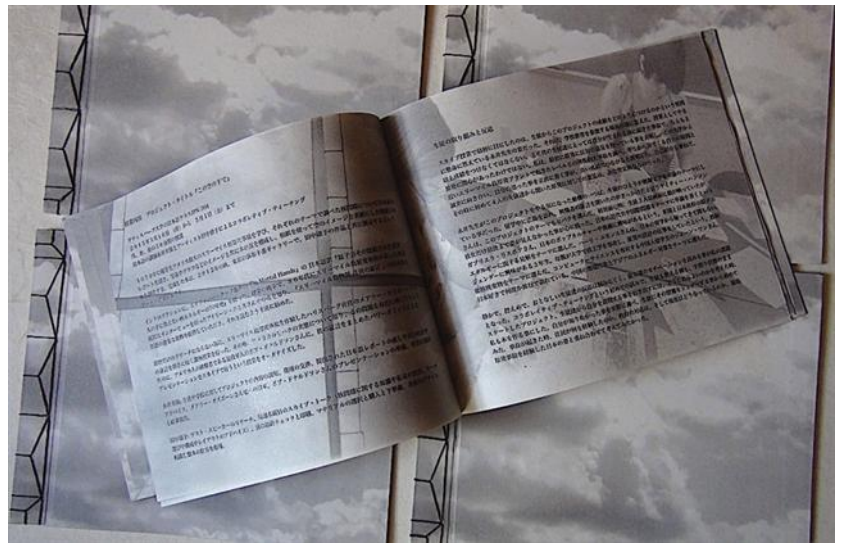
where uranium mines are located; where nuclear tests have been conducted; and where atomic bombs were dropped. My research materials and my writing have become more important for creating my works in recent years. I started visiting the places related to environmental issues in order to ascertain what is happening with my own eyes.

Every event is the result of accumulated past events. Past, present, and future are linked. See what's happening in the world, then explore stories of our future that become visible under this sky. My project, *Under This Sky*, is for predicting our future through sharing personal experiences. I created photo panels that overlapped images of photos taken at my research sites and sky photos taken at my residential area. The project aims to draw out consciousness from viewers to elsewhere, to visualize the connection between themselves and their societies, and to lead them to recognize environmental issues. It is an ongoing project to fill the boundaries between printmaking and photography, arts and journalism.

*Under This Sky* also became my bookmaking project, as I have been creating collaborative teaching programs using bookmaking techniques. In 2015, I collaboratively taught a Japanese advanced class with Japanese language teacher Miho Nagai at Gettysburg College. I and four advanced Japanese students researched the Three Mile Island nuclear accident and made hand-bound books about nuclear issues.

This year, 2019, is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. I interviewed Mary Stamos, who experienced the accident, and learned that its impact continues. During the memorial day of the Three Mile





Island and Fukushima nuclear accidents, the exhibition *If the Wind Blows* on the themes of nuclear and local environmental issues was held from March 7 to April 13, 2019, at the 20/20 Gallery, at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, New York City. I am currently researching the historical Manhattan Project, which started the manufacture of nuclear bombs, to create an artist's book through printmaking.

I have worked on socially engaged art and education using printmaking and bookmaking skills. Through printmaking, I have been engaged in self-reforming, connecting printmaking to social change. It transformed me from a printmaker into a social practice artist.

## Image Documentation

Sample of 365 key printing plates

*Transform 1*, collagraph, burned edge, 30" x 22", 2009

Exhibition at the Burj el-Barajneh Palestinian Refugee Camp, 2011, photo by Junko Hoki

*All Things Are Linked: Hotspots*, embossed, dyed maps, paper cranes, burned edge, 23.5" x 36", 2016

Postcard of two person exhibition by Ichiro Koguchi and Yasuyo Tanaka at the Yaita City Library in 2017

*Under This Sky*, bookmaking collaborative teaching project, B&W photographs and text, digitally printed on Japanese paper, Japanese style binding, 8.5" x 11", 2015

*Under This Sky 1*, B&W photographs, digitally printed on Japanese paper, transparent image silkscreen, panel with magnets, 33" x 43", 16 panels each 7.5" x 10", 2015

## Artist Information

Yasuyo Tanaka is a social practice artist and educator. She's a first-generation Japanese immigrant living in New York City. She works on interdisciplinary approaches using printmaking, photography, writing and bookbinding as her main artistic media. Her works consist of different techniques, media and disciplines in order to broaden her range of expression, and to raise her own and other's social consciousness and heighten independent thinking. As collaborative teaching projects "To teach is to be taught," she creates plans for classes that are themed on social and environmental issues by using art techniques. Her exhibitions, workshops, artist talks and projects are held nationally and internationally. The year after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Japan in 2011, she became a co-founding member of the Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World, New York City. International disputes, environmental issues, borders, discrimination, identity, media literacy and self-transformation are motivations for her work.  
[yasuyoart.blogspot.com](http://yasuyoart.blogspot.com)  
[cargocollective.com/yasuyotanaka](http://cargocollective.com/yasuyotanaka)



## **WELCOME TO THE GAME: HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN AMERICA**

**Sarah Serio**

It's not uncommon to read a news article about some horror happening in the world and then, in a few days, forget all about it. Our lives and the situations that directly affect them take precedent. This happened to me when I first learned about human trafficking. I read an article in my college newspaper, what was happening was horrible, and then, in a few days, it was forgotten. My final semester of college, I happened to see an awareness campaign video on YouTube and it made me recall the article I'd once read and forgotten. It was then that I realized that if I could so easily ignore the then-estimated 27 million people who were victims of some form of human trafficking, then so could everyone else and I needed to do something about that.

Today, the International Labor Organization estimates there are over 40 million victims of human trafficking globally; that's more than the combined metropolitan areas of New York City and Los Angeles. This includes forced labor, child victims, and both male and female victims of sex trafficking. Human trafficking, which encompasses both the sex slave trade and labor trade, is a \$32 billion industry annually. It has surpassed the illegal sale of weapons to become the second largest global crime.

Often the visual imagery used to bring awareness to human trafficking is sanitized, showing a girl bearing a bar code and ropes around her wrist. My work strives to bring the harsh reality of this world to light. Human trafficking does

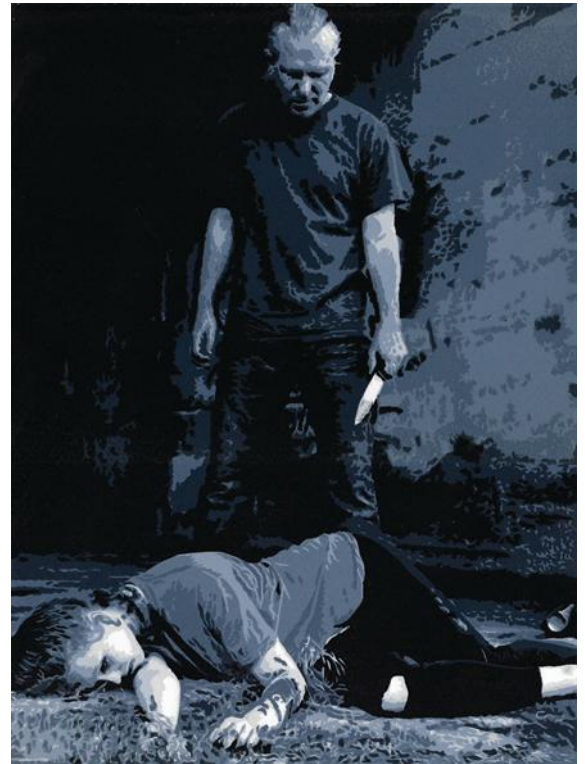
not discriminate, it just exploits. Advertising campaigns ignore the overlooked groups of male and child victims who are similarly sold into prostitution.

Victims are taken, not by choice, and forced to experience various stages of degradation and physical and psychological torture often by starvation, violence and repeated rape. I hope to bring to the viewer the true pain and suffering felt by those trapped in this terrible practice so that they don't forget.

I am a printmaker creating works in the traditional methods of hand-carved, hand-inked, and hand-pulled prints. The main body of the work is in reduction block prints. The layers of ink build a foundation to tell the story of those suffering in this violent and demeaning world. I strive to be educated in this area, so that I can create works that genuinely tell the story of this enslavement.

Each print starts with researching various forms of human trafficking and reading harrowing stories from survivors. Notes are taken of minor victims and their entrance into trafficking, how female traffickers are on the rise and were typically former victims themselves, and how male victims still feel pressure from society to not report what has happened to them. I take various aspects of different survivor stories and use them to educate those who model for photos that I take and then use for reference images. I am attempting to create a linear story depicting the male victim, the female trafficker, the minor victim and the female victim. Each print tells its own unique story, but also pushes and pulls the viewer into the piece next to it when exhibited together.





Models help bring awareness to the issue by taking on the roles of victims, pimps, johns and enforcers. They must channel the pain, suffering and despair felt by victims or take on the challenge of placing themselves in the part of the abuser, finding the strength to portray a violent individual performing violent acts. I look for locations that reflect the true story of the situation. I bring in professional makeup artists to recreate the violent and sometimes fatal wounds inflicted on people trapped in this hidden world.

I spend hours combing through my reference images to create the most powerful pieces possible before I transfer that design to a lino block. Hours of slow and careful carving, often with a small one millimeter wide V-shaped blade, gradually expose the image for printing. I use a heavy 100% cotton paper to print my editions on as it has to stand up to 8 to 11 layers printed on a manually-operated etching press.

As each layer is printed, I watch as a new horror grows and emerges. I document this process by taking photos of each layer and sharing them on Instagram so that the viewers can appreciate not only the time and effort that goes into each print, but also the realization of what's happening in each image. We can never take a situation at face value; we must look at all its parts to understand what is happening.

Presenting an honest view into human trafficking is one of the most important aspects of my work. While these images may not be easy to view or works you'd display in your living room, they are vitally important. I strive to create a dialogue between the work and the viewer so that they leave with a new respect for the issue at hand.

Allowing viewers to look into the eyes of a child being raped, a woman being beaten and a man coerced into a nightmare, engages the viewer in making a connection with the issue at hand. I believe that people must connect with the victims, taking in what they feel, emotionally and physically, in order to bring an end to this social injustice.

By visually showing the public what is happening, right here in our hometowns, every day, it opens up the opportunity for discussion and education. We cannot hope to bring an end to this practice if people do not connect with the victims and take in what they are feeling emotionally and experiencing physically.

### Artist Information

Sarah Serio is a nationally exhibiting printmaker residing in southwest Missouri. She received degrees in fine art and graphic communication from Missouri Southern State University. She is active in her area arts community serving as President of the Neosho Arts Council and previously serving as President of Joplin Regional Artists Coalition. She is also a member of the Mid America Print Council, Spiva Center for the Arts, artCentral Carthage and Neosho Arts Council Circle of Patrons.  
sarahserio.weebly.com

### Image Documentation

All hand carved, reduction block print  
*Trapped in The Amber of This Moment*, 12" x 9", 2018  
*So the Devil Takes His Soul*, 9" x 12", 2018  
*One More Transaction Going Down*, 8" x 10", 2016  
*As Her Last Breath Moves Through Her*, 12" x 9", 2018



## JOHANNESBURG PRINTMAKING AS COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

**Roxy Kaczmarek**

The current South African social and political landscape is layered with complex notions of race, gender, identity and culture, along with ideas concerning wealth, poverty and the economy. These are shaped by a specific history and set of inflections—namely colonialism and the apartheid regime. The city of Johannesburg is a melting pot of people from across South Africa and the continent beyond, blending culture, communities and language. This article identifies three emerging printmaking collectives in Johannesburg currently engaging with these notions.

Printmaking, as a collective practice, played a critical role in protest against the racist regime of apartheid in South Africa. Under the violence of apartheid, a strong history of cultural resistance/protest movements in collaborative art-making was forged. Artists collectively used printmaking to convey political statements that were easily disseminated by making posters, banners, T-shirts and artworks. Printmaking styles and collective operation during this period have influenced many younger South African artists. These younger artists—currently in their twenties and early thirties—so-called “born-frees”<sup>1</sup>—are challenged by many social, political and economic issues.

The print studio encourages collaborative practice through resource sharing of the studio equipment and collective expertise. I am particularly interested in how this modality of collective practice as a system of communal support and multiplicity of perspectives can contribute to South

African artists’ intersection with socio political issues in contemporary society. The artist collectives: Alphabet Zoo, Danger Gevaar Ingozi and Title in Transgression each demonstrate, through their recent projects, a particular attitude towards practicing contemporary African art and negotiating identity politics in South Africa.

Alphabet Zoo (AZ) is a zine-producing printmaking duo comprising artists Isaac Zavale and Minenkulu Ngoyi, who attended the community education and printmaking centre Artist Proof Studio (APS) in Johannesburg.

The duo formed around the making of a street-culture zine that invites collaboration from young artists, illustrators, publishers and designers. In their work Ngoyi and Zavale use a host of printmaking mediums, including linocut, drypoint, monotype and silkscreen. They also facilitate exhibitions, print collaborative projects and run workshops. Their past work as technical printmakers and collaborators with young emerging artists at the Prints on Paper workshop demonstrates their commitment to developing printmaking as a prominent medium in Johannesburg.

Their collective exhibition titled *June/July*, at the Kalashnikovv Gallery, revolved around South Africans’ fear in the current political condition, which embraces land redistribution, transformation, racial and religious stereotypes and decolonization.

Zavale was born in Mozambique and moved with his family as a child to South Africa to escape civil war in 1989. His work often reflects imagery of the AK-47 rifle as well as animals such as birds, as seen in Zavale’s linocut *One Day*, and the repetitive pattern of the gun in *Kapulana*.





These can be interpreted as symbols of complexities of freedom and violence in both countries.

Born in Johannesburg, and related through his grandmother to the leader of the Shembe Church, Isaiah Shembe, Ngoyi creates work that explores notions of identity politics and through it he often considers his family's connection to the Shembe way of life.

More recently, AZ collaborated with established artist Thenjiwe Nkosi, in a project at The Reading Room. This was done through a pop-up workshop alongside Nkosi's exhibited painting series *Heroes* at the Goethe Institute, Johannesburg. Nkosi's series presents portraits of people, some familiar and some less so, who complicate the notion of who and what is defined as a hero. AZ's workshops investigate this further through collaboration with a series of artists using printmaking, zine making and collage.

The printmaking studio and collective DGI was co-founded in downtown Johannesburg by Chad Cordeiro, Nathaniel Sheppard III and Sbongiseni Khulu along with their business partner Anaz Mia. The initiative evolved from a shared love of printmaking and the desire to create an alternative platform for young emerging artists. As a young collective platform (in age and in activity) their projects are filled with potential and constantly developing different narratives and modalities.

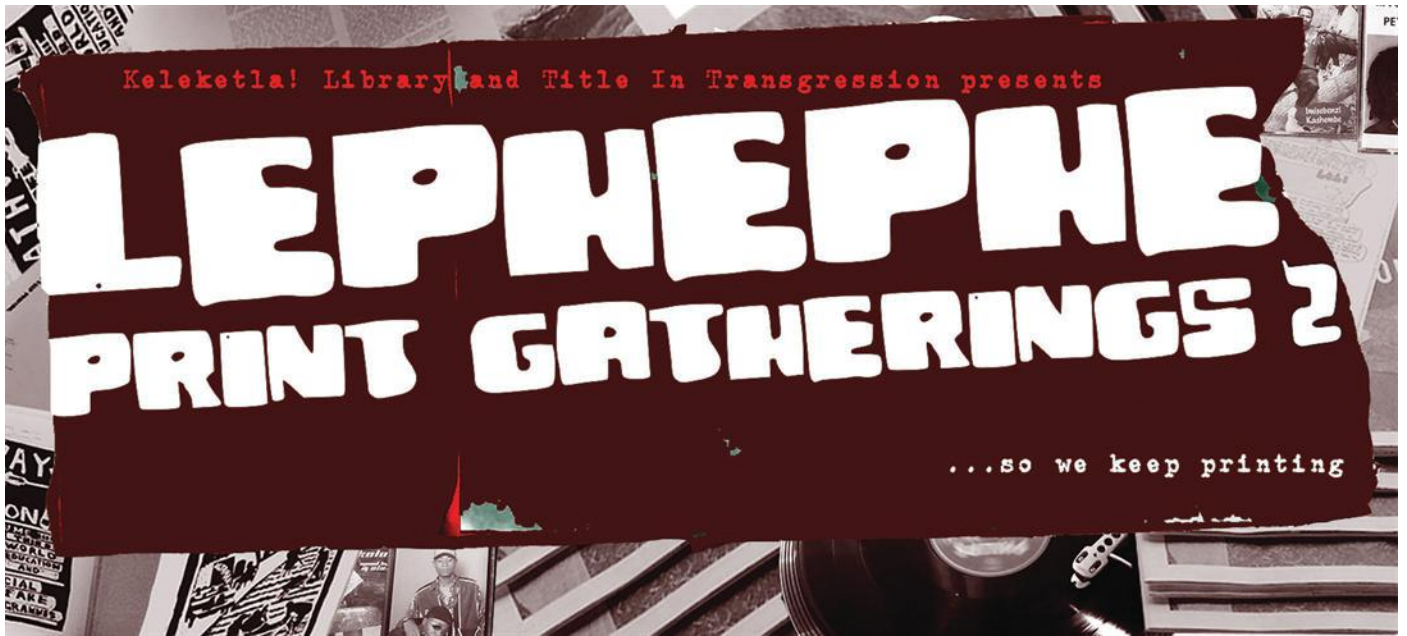
Their academic backgrounds influence their conceptual collaborative practice and their work connected to the commercial print studio, David Krut Workshop (DKW), has influenced how they navigate the commercial art world. Working at DKW, they have been involved in and



gained experience working with the studio's master printer, Jillian Ross, on an epic collaborative project for William Kentridge titled *Triumphs and Laments*, an in-progress large-scale woodcut project. Each print is made up of multiple sheets of printed woodcuts combining to form large prints roughly 2 x 2 meters. The project is based on Kentridge's monumental 10 meter high frieze along the Tiber River in Rome and considers the glories and tragedies of the city.

*Kwaal-ity Control*, an exhibition of co-created work by Cordeiro and Sheppard III (which featured Khulu assisting in the editioning process), was hosted at David Krut Projects Gallery and looked at the hierarchical roles in the printmaking industry and art world in South Africa. Cordeiro's linocut *The Borrowers: Financial Relief*, addresses politics of the institution related to artists and their work. Sheppard's nine piece linocut *Empire Strikes Back*, (inspired and challenged by the scale of Kentridge's woodcut series) features a collage aesthetic of life sized miners signifying unseen laborers, newspaper article headlines and a figure of each of the three collective members armed with printmaking equipment: Khulu holding a ruler as if a sword, Cordeiro brandishing two rollers and Sheppard III, himself, holding cans of ink some falling from his arms. They appear to be equipped, ready to fight against established institutions with their printmaking tools.

Cordeiro and Sheppard III took part in the project titled *A Labour of Love* in Frankfurt, Germany, under the invitation of the curator and their university lecturer Gabi Ngcobo. Ngcobo invited a number of artists to respond, in terms of historical and political content, to a key collection



of 600 prints by South African artists, acquired in the 1980s by Hans Blum and housed at the Weltkulturen Museum. Cordeiro and Sheppard III's work feature some contemporary iterations of images in the collection and other unique creations produced in the medium of linocut. Their participation in the third season of the Centre for the Less Good Idea: *Writing for the Eye/Writing for the Ear*, culminated in a project titled *State Proof* in collaboration with Simnikiwe Buhlungu. The work they made is part of an ongoing "sonic research project" using music and dialogue to instigate conversations about how music collections illustrate complex personal and global narratives often existing along the peripheries of contemporary culture. The product was recorded onto vinyl and contained in a silkscreened cover. They draw comparison to printmaking and analogue music creation, cutting, pasting and pressing music to vinyl. Their mixed media approach to print is wired with an awareness of political and historical concerns that is combined with their enterprise to provide a platform for emerging artists to access printmaking outside the traditional established spaces.

Recently graduated students Simnikiwe Buhlungu and Malebona Maphutse got together to form Title in Transgression. These multidisciplinary artists do not use printmaking as a primary medium but rather incorporate it in their projects along with other mediums. Their studies coincided with the #FeesMustFall movement, and they participated in silkscreening protest t-shirts that mirrored the use of T-shirts as a common and a longstanding protest in South Africa. Title in Transgression came together to work collectively in response to their discomfort about

feeling marginalised in a majority white visual art class and to express their feelings of frustration at the particular curricula at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. One notable project that brought these artists to public notice is an experimental public festival called Lephephe Print Gatherings, promoting urban black culture in collaboration with the Keleketla! Library in downtown Johannesburg. This event is an experimental project and approach to the distribution of printed material including zines, books, publications, poems and fine art prints. The events include talks, poetry, film, independent publishers and workshops.

Their current and ongoing project *Mangolo* was presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art as part of the public programme *I'm Not Who You Think I'm Not #10*. The project investigates the solidarity movement between Sweden's International Defense Aid Fund and the Dependents Conference, which existed under the South African Council of Churches during the 1960s–1980s. It involves building a "walking archive" of oral history through video recorded interviews and letters. As part of the programme in Berlin they printed their publication in four colours using a Risograph machine.

In conclusion, these three groups demonstrate the mobilization of emerging artists around a collective modality that is influenced by a strong historical print and collective practice in South Africa. "The arts still have a potentially fundamental role to play in addressing the social dysfunction in our society<sup>2</sup>." This approach is one that has the potential to encourage thinking and coming together to work out creative responses to the complexities of society.





<sup>1</sup>The term “born-free” refers to the generation born near or after the end of apartheid who are supposedly free from oppression yet still live with its repercussions. An example of this surfaced during the 2016–18 #FeesMustFall protests across South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Berman, Kim, *Students as Agents of Change: Engagement between University-Based Art Students and Alternative Spaces*, Third Text, 2013, Vol. 27, No. 3, p.387–399, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

## Writer's Information

Roxy Kaczmarek (1990) grew up in Cape Town, South Africa and currently lives and works in Johannesburg. She specialises in printmaking, which she explores through her art practice and her work for David Krut Workshop and Galleries. She obtained a BA in Fine Art from the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art in 2012, before working as a printer and studio manager at Warren Editions Print Studio, Cape Town. Kaczmarek is currently pursuing a Masters in Fine Art from the University of Johannesburg specialising in printmaking. Her topic of study is: How are selected emerging printmaking collectives in Johannesburg re-framing the traditional model of printmaking, in concept and scope of practice.

[instagram.com/roxykaczmarek/](https://www.instagram.com/roxykaczmarek/)



## Image Documentation

Alphabet Zoo, multiple zines

Isaac Zavale, *One Day*, linocut on Arches, 57" x 45", 2017

Sbongiseni Khulu, *History vs Ideals*, linocut on Somerset Velvet, soft white, edition of 15, 10.6" x 12", 2015, image credit the David Krut Projects

Nathaniel Sheppard III, *Empire Strikes Back*, IV of IX, linocut on Somerset Velvet, soft white, 47" x 35.5", 2016, image credit the David Krut Projects

Keleketla! Library and Title in Transgression, *Lephephe Print Gathering 2 Poster*, 11.69" x 16.5", 2018

Alphabet Zoo, Isaac Zavale, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2018

Danger Gevaar Ingozi, from left to right, Chad Cordeiro, Nathaniel Sheppard III and Sbongiseni Khulu, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2018

Title in Transgression, from left to right, Boitumelo Motau, Simnikiwe Buhlungu, Malebona Maphutse and Dineo Diphofa, wearing T-shirts made during the #FeesMustFall protests in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2017





## PRINTMAKING, POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN NEW DETROIT

### Eno Laget

On a warm September evening in 2014 Lorraine MacBeth-Underwood smiled and reached up to embrace her son Sean on the street outside Dell Pryor Gallery in Detroit's Cass Corridor. "I always knew you were an artist," she said. Sean Day, a hulk of a man who has worked as a produce truck driver in Eastern Market for many years, beamed and hugged his Mom. "Thank you for showing what I've always known was in him," Lorraine whispered to me.

Because of encouraging moments like this I began to understand my printmaking workshop, Two Blacks Studio, could add value to the community of Detroit. And so, Sean Day and four other amateur artists with no printmaking experience headed back inside the gallery to view the art they made for their very first art exhibition. For more than a dozen years Sean had been using his smart phone to capture sunrises from the cab of his delivery truck on the streets of southwest Detroit. A pre-dawn photo became the source and inspiration for a streetscape stencil print for the show. Sean's print, a 36" x 56", multi-color stencil, required careful hand cutting of more than 10 layers of pin registered 0.005 mil Dura-Lar sheets, and sensitive application of spray enamel onto builder's paper.

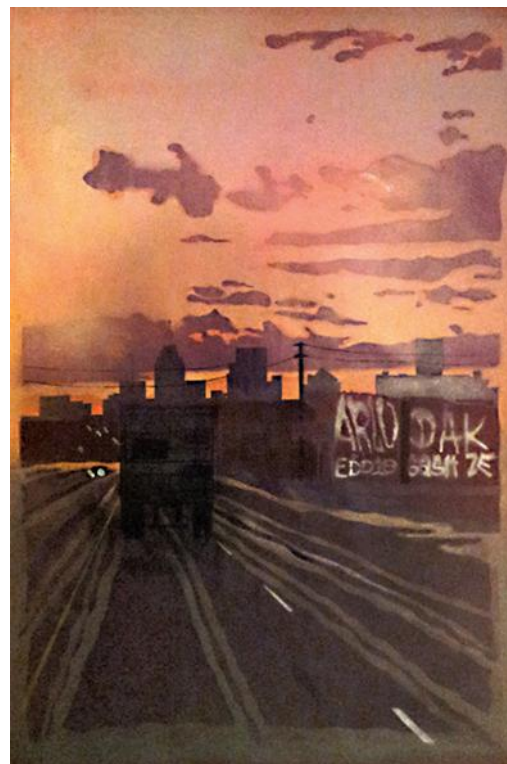
### Challenging Academia

Months earlier I had answered an open call for printmaking proposals for the Mid-America Print Council annual conference, sponsored that year by Wayne State

University in downtown Detroit. My proposal, *Street Knowledge: The Push and Punch of Pochoir*, was a challenge. Teach amateurs with no art or printmaking experience how to make large scale multi-colored prints, on a limited budget, with no access to traditional fine art printmaking equipment or materials. Two months of teaching and curation produced two overlapping public exhibitions, a live demonstration of process during the conference, some wheat paste mischief on the street and five confident amateurs with skill to execute a portfolio of prints on a shoestring budget.

This was just the beginning of exploring printmaking opportunities mostly outside established institutional norms. A mix of socially conscious art from other participants developed. Danielle Kaltz, a Detroit librarian, made multiple stencil portraits of a Detroit mother of five, civil rights martyr Viola Liuzzo for her assemblage, *What Color am I? Why Does It Matter?* Lebree Jones, an industrial designer, chose to reimagine a moment in the 1947 Joe Louis versus Jersey Joe Wolcott boxing contest. Louis was knocked down, but time and time again he got back up, an apt metaphor for our disinvested city now in super-gentrification mode downtown. Ben Friedman, a producer/videographer, appropriated a popular celebratory photo image from the 1984 World Series. His culture-jammed remake of Tiger Kirk Gibson celebrating the series win appeared as a stencil on a storefront window near Comerica Park where Detroit Tigers fans were passing by on their way to a home game. It was a simple yet arresting hijack of popular culture in support of *Black Lives Matter* after the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson.





## Hybrid Process

As an independent artist in Detroit I live and work outside the academic, fine art environment. My art practice closely aligns with artist, gallerist and author Martin Irvine's assessment of contemporary visual culture. Irvine says, "For most artists today, street art is simply a shorthand term for multiple ways of doing art in dialog with a city in a continuity of practice that spans street, studio, gallery, museum and the Internet." The city, rather than the studio, is where the ephemeral form of my practice challenges the public and private regimes that control urban spaces.

It is commitment to social justice and enthusiasm for street art that more than a dozen years ago started me making large hybrid stencil wheat pastes on newsprint. This was the least expensive way to get up big on the street. Graphic arts experience with newspaper printing helped me realize that I could repurpose stainless steel register pins to quickly align stencil color layers for printing. These pins are mostly obsolete for commercial printing, hard to come by and expensive to buy new. Desperate for pins for teaching classes, I discovered that plastic drinking straws were the perfect diameter to fit a standard heavy-duty ¼-inch hole punch. For a few cents, register pins can be made from sections of plastic straw cut and taped to matboard tabs.

Within my independent art practice, I have learned to appreciate the simplicity and versatility of the stencil process. While hand cutting stencils in layers is time consuming, the ability to work large format to produce cheap prints has fueled experimentation with the medium. Liberated from the width of rollers, length of press bed and messy cleanup of serigraphy, I have been able to print on

coffee bean sacks, salvaged car hoods, T-shirts and skate board decks, almost any flat or semi-flat surface.

I have been using stencil printing as a way to explore art's potential to transform society. In summer 2018, with generous support from ArtPlace America, an artist friend and I completed a grassroots creative place-making project in his northeast Detroit neighborhood. Walter Bailey's *Art Forest* in Krainz Woods Park is a city authorized art park created inside a Detroit public park. Five wooden structures hold panels of art with 10 images that express neighborhood character and concerns.

For this social practice project, large scale stencil portraits of current and historical figures form the backbone of a permanent display because of local history there. A line-drawing stencil of Sojourner Truth, a significant figure in women's rights history, provided the outlines for neighborhood children to paint her portrait in full color. Her portrait borders the north end of Krainz Woods Park where the *Art Forest* is situated in this long-neglected section of the city.

I now also use a more detailed version of the *Sojourner* print as a transportable interactive history lesson about housing discrimination in Detroit. I encourage people to engage and alter the art by writing their thoughts on the portrait. I believe there is tremendous transformative potential in creative activity. Art initiated, front-and-center conversation about the future of our neighborhoods puts the thriving downtown development, where more than 1,000 cameras monitor our every move, in striking contrast to some neglected city districts where a 911 call may take more than an hour to be answered if at all.



Multi-color stencil making can be very time intensive. It requires thinking, planning and patience to work out a design before cutting can even begin. Designing layers for printing requires attention to detail and some deep thought to understand the complexity of the process. Strategic placement of islands and bridges to hold sections of imagery in place is a hard concept to visualize until you have to do it. Before layers are actually printed it is impossible to see all the decisions that have been made about where highlight, midtone and shadow edges will hopefully resolve into a pleasing mix of lines and shapes. Even so, a beautiful stylization of form and shape happens naturally when cutting openings for paint to spray through. For every novice stencil cutter, there is always a magic moment when, after the final sprayed layer is made, the full color image is revealed for the first time. Postponed gratification finds its reward is increased confidence. Children in particular come out of the experience as better problem solvers, and more capable of tackling the next complex challenge that comes their way.

### Postscript: Hip, Hip, Hooray!

A little less than a year after Sean Day exhibited his streetscape stencil at Dell Pryor Gallery he woke up one morning unable to get out of bed because of intense pain in his hips. All those years of muscling produce on and off a truck had crippled him. I remember how Sean, sometimes with his son Sean Patrick along to help, would show up frequently to work on his stencil. It was always a slow go for him getting up the stairs to our second level workspace inside what was once the home of Lincoln Motor Car manufacturing in Detroit. The doctors could not understand how he had been able to walk at all over the past year. His hips were worn out, bone to socket grind with every step. Because Sean was out of work for many months and in danger of losing his apartment our novice crew of printmakers sprang into action, starting a GoFundMe campaign to help pay bills while he went



for hip replacement surgery and rehab. He signed and numbered an edition of 10 prints of *Sean's Fort Street, Detroit, 6:00 a.m.* With a contribution of \$300 and above for each print, enough money was raised to keep him solvent for six months. Today Sean is walking with two brand new hips and he's itching to get back in the studio.

### Artist Information

Eno Laget works as an independent artist in Detroit, Michigan. For the past seven years he has operated a mobile, limited-resource printmaking experience using the pochoir (stencil) process. His Two Blacks Studio is dedicated to teaching multi-color stencil process and printing as a community-based, socially conscious creative outreach. He is a resident artist at Recycle Here, a resource recovery facility in NW Goldberg, Detroit and is also a member of the artist/maker collective Make:Art:Work.

[facebook.com/eno.laget](https://facebook.com/eno.laget)

### Image Documentation

Walter Bailey's Art Forest inside Krainz Woods Park, Detroit. Women's rights activist, *Sojourner Truth*, left, was painted by neighborhood artists on an outline stencil. Sojourner Truth Houses, a federal housing project bearing her name, sits on the south end of Krainz Woods Park.

Sean Day, novice artist and printmaker, feathers the sky of his multi-color stencil print with aerosol spray enamel.

Sean Day, *Fort Street, Detroit, 6 a.m.* stencil print, 56" x36", 2014

Danielle Kaltz, left, and Lebre Jones, right, paste up stencil art.

Ben Friedman hijacked a famous Tiger's World Series celebratory photo to make a statement about the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson. His stencil print *Don't Shoot* on the window of Swords Into Plowshares Gallery, 2015





## ON PRESS: MAKING VISIBLE AN UNSEEN DETROIT

**Lynne Avadenka and Lee Marchalonis**

*The results are a celebration of some of Detroit's best qualities: artists involved in social practice, organizations oriented toward shaping an equitable and inclusive city through food sovereignty and environmental justice and opportunities to leverage the overlap between the two.<sup>1</sup>—Sarah Rose Sharp*

Signal-Return, a letterpress print shop and community arts center founded in 2011, is located in Detroit's Eastern Market, a mere half-block from Shed 3, the primary location of the country's oldest continuously running farmers market. Signal-Return's location is very easily accessible by foot, and the walk-in traffic we enjoy has been a key factor in the visibility of our programming.

With a 3,000 square-foot space, almost a third is devoted to retail sales of hand-pulled prints, cards and ephemera and the remaining space is our studio, with five flatbed cylinder proof presses and a comprehensive collection of wood and metal type. The entire space is open and depending what else is going on in the studio, visitors are often encouraged to walk into the printing and typesetting area to explore and to speak with those engaged in setting, carving, or printing. Sales of particular prints have indicated that a good deal of visitors are interested in purchasing Detroit-themed artwork.

The idea for *On Press: Making Visible an Unseen Detroit*, arose out of discussions between Signal-Return's director, Lynne Avadenka and its lead printer, Lee Marchalonis, in

an effort to tie together both surrounding resources and our own. This has come at a time when national politics is fraught with divisiveness and disrespect. The project takes place at the local level. Each of the 12 participating artists is invited to select a service non-profit of particular interest to that person, and to create an original work in support of that organization's efforts. As a result Signal-Return studio fills up with 12 new artists and our retail space fills with new prints which visually and financially support specific efforts on the local level to improve the lives of Detroit's inhabitants. It is our hope that these pieces offer a small window into specific efforts at grassroots problem-solving, as well as aesthetic alternatives to generic and superficial representations of "Detroit boosterism."

Once the invited artists have agreed to participate they are introduced to the shop and to the specific requirements of the project through group meetings. As most of the artists do not have experience with relief carving and printing, the first meeting covers basic materials and examples, and introduces carving techniques. By the second meeting artists will have identified their preferred non-profit service organization and may have begun designing imagery. In the studio, they are invited to try out the press, learn procedures for transferring imagery to blocks, and practice carving. The artists then work one-on-one with the lead printer to further develop their piece, and finally to print. So far, six selected artists have completed images from hand-carved blocks with up to four runs. They work with a maximum paper size of 18" x 24", and a maximum image size of 16" x 22". Matrices are linoleum and wood. Signal-Return has among its presses a Vandercook



325G, which has a non-motorized inking system. Each impression requires the operator to step on a foot pedal to open the grippers (which hold the paper in position), to crank the cylinder as she walks the two step length of the press, remove the paper when the cylinder has reached its stopping point at the end of the press, and return the carriage to its rest position at the feed board. When printing a large background linoleum block which retains most of its surface area, the press might need to be re-inked as frequently as every three prints.

Final color proofing and ink mixing usually takes two days. Printing three runs on 200 sheets of paper can take 2 or 3 long printing sessions depending on the ink coverage. Based on the artist's particular interest level in the actual press operation, they will take a larger or smaller role. In general, due to accuracy and efficiency, the lead printer will operate the press for final editioning while the artist is present, consulted and involved.

A "signing party" occurs just prior to the release of the prints, and to celebrate completion of each group we host a publication party at Signal-Return. We send suites containing the collection of 12 prints to the project funders. The Scarab Club, a Detroit art institution founded in 1907, will host an exhibition in 2019, and Signal-Return has had the prints on continuous display. Prints are available in both our brick-and-mortar store and our online store. Fifty percent of the purchase price goes to the non-profit named, the other half stays with Signal-Return to support its mission and programming. In addition, each artist is given a stipend for their participation.

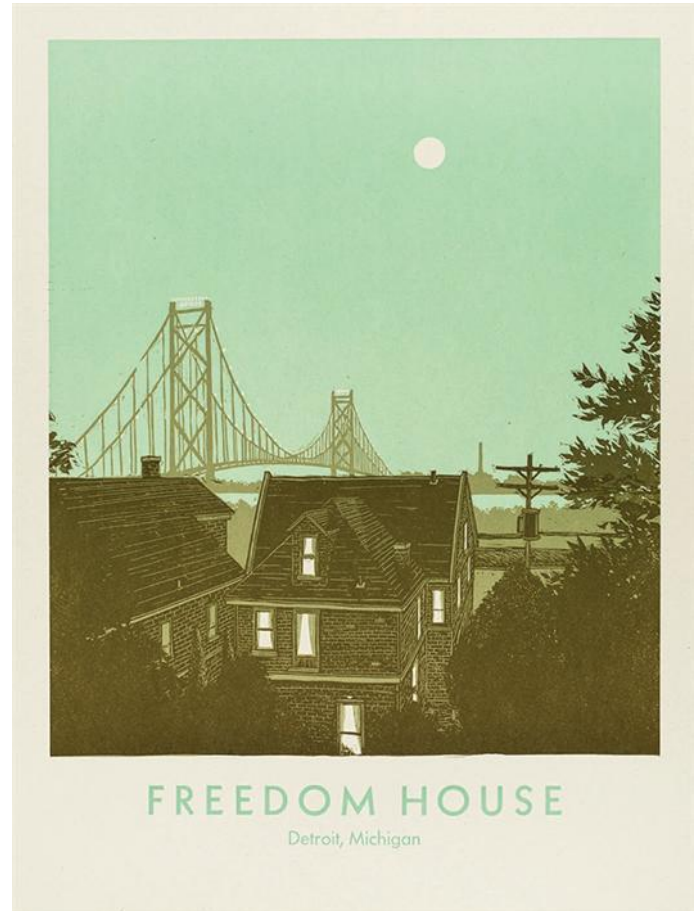
The project has been a learning experience for our press, for the artists and for the nonprofits. In our first partnerships, several artists came in knowing which nonprofit they wanted to promote. Artist Sabrina Nelson's mother is a social worker, so her selection to make a print for Black Family Development (a non profit organization of social workers in the city) was very meaningful to her. Sabrina is influenced by the Yoruba religion, along with Eastern and African philosophy. She describes her work as a combination of "spirit, motion and intimacy."

Pat Perry had been in touch with Freedom House (a nonprofit helping asylum seekers) before we invited him to participate, and was happy for the opportunity to bring attention to their good work.

Lee Marchalonis and Lynne Avadenka visited Freedom House to explain the project to them and to learn about their organization, whose mission is to uphold the fundamental American principle, inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, providing safety for those "yearning to be free."

As an organization dependent upon grant funding, and one which embraces both craftsmanship and creative expression, the structure of this project is designed to bring people together (artists, service non-profit organizations, Signal-Return and our customers), to use the power of the original multiple and the inherent beauty of a traditional printmaking technique to support the efforts of others in the city. Together we are louder.





## Sources

<sup>1</sup>Hyperallergic, *An Independent Print Shop Finds Ways to Connect Artists to Detroit's Nonprofits*, Sarah Rose Sharp, <https://hyperallergic.com/author/sarah-rose-sharp/>

## List of Invited Artists and Selected Nonprofits

Mark Arminski/Georgia St. Community Collective; WC Bevan/WNUC Radio; Olayami Dabls/Mariners Inn; Louise Jones/Detroit Hives; Andrew Krieger/The Children's Center; Nicole McDonald/Wild Indigo; Azucena Nava-Moreno/Detroit Horse Power; Sabrina Nelson/Black Family Development; Pat Perry/Freedom House; Renata Palubinskas/Keep Growing Detroit; Renee Rials/Cots; Vito Valdez/Last Day Dog Rescue

## Writers' Information

Lynne Avadenka was appointed Signal-Return Director in 2013. Under her leadership Signal-Return has received grants from Michigan foundations including The Michigan Council of Arts and Cultural Affairs, The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan and national foundations including The Bader Family Charitable Foundation, The John S. And James L. Knight Foundation and The Windgate Foundation. She has been involved in the Detroit arts community since receiving her MFA in printmaking at Wayne State University in 1981. Avadenka has received individual artist grants from Kresge Arts in Detroit, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs. Her work can be found in The British Library; The Detroit Institute of Arts; The Jewish Museum, New York; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Library of Congress; The New York Public Library; The Meermano

Museum, The Netherlands; The Watson Library at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Lee Marchalonis holds a Master of Fine Arts Degree in printmaking from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She worked as a letterpress printer at Yee-Haw Industries and at Kala Institute in Berkeley, California and has studied book arts at the University of Iowa. A recipient of a Stein Scholarship & Residency at the Center for Book Arts in New York City in 2013, her work is in Special Collections libraries throughout the U.S. Currently Lead Printer at Signal-Return print shop in Detroit, she teaches printmaking at the University of Michigan Stamps School of Art & Design, and has recently established a lithographic editioning studio. She has printed editions for artists including Hernan Bas, Alison Bechdel, Henrik Drescher and Artemio Rodriguez. [signalreturnpress.org](http://signalreturnpress.org)

[lynne@signalreturnpress.org](mailto:lynne@signalreturnpress.org), [lee@signalreturnpress.org](mailto:lee@signalreturnpress.org)

## Image Documentation

Renata Palubinskas, *Keep Growing Detroit*, relief, 22" x 16", photo by R.H. Hensleigh

Making inking decision, from left, Sabrina Nelson, Louise Jones, Vito Valdez, Pat Perry and Renata Palubinskas, photo by Jeanne Pope

Vito Valdez from Last Day Dog Rescue signing his edition, photo by Lynne Avadenka

Sabrina Nelson, *Black Family Development*, relief, 22" x 16", photo by R.H. Hensleigh

Pat Perry, *Freedom House*, relief, 22" x 16", photo by R.H. Hensleigh



## ACTIVISM AND AESTHETICS

### Robin McCloskey

In 2014 adjunct faculty at San Francisco Bay Area universities began to advocate for labor justice. Instructors at Mills College, Saint Mary's, San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), California College of the Arts (CCA) and Dominican University, where I have been teaching for over a decade, all held union elections and within a few short months all had joined SEIU Local 1021. In the following year, faculty at Notre Dame de Namur and Holy Names College joined our ranks.

### What motivated these campaigns?

Full-time, tenure track professors, the middle class of academia, have been slowly disappearing from our campuses over the last 40 years. In their place has emerged an army of gig workers, adjunct professors, who are poorly paid and usually have no benefits. Across America more than half of all faculty appointments are part-time, contingent faculty. At Dominican University at the time of our unionization, adjuncts comprised 75% of the faculty and taught half of all classes. These kinds of numbers are distressingly similar across the US. Many adjunct faculty work multiple jobs, commuting from campus to campus, trying to piece together a living wage.

I joined this movement in its early stages at Dominican University. I was motivated by my love of teaching and my conviction that current campus employment conditions are unfair to both students and faculty. I have remained



committed to the cause, and served on the bargaining team that successfully negotiated our first contract that begins to address many of the inequities faced by our adjunct faculty.

Institutional change does not come easily, and throughout our organizing and bargaining we often needed to communicate our concerns to members of our university community and to the broader public. Art making played an important role in helping to spread our message.

One of the first actions we held on campus was a public screenprinting event. We gave the prints away to anyone who was willing to take one, students, faculty and staff. It was encouraging when we began to see the posters mounted on bulletin boards and outside offices on campus. Later during that same school year, we held a relief-printing event on Cesar Chavez Day. While many honor his memory, often forgotten is that he was a tireless advocate for unionization to address the plight of the farm workers. Our goal was to educate our community while honoring this giant of the labor movement.

On other campuses, innovative actions were taking place, particularly at SFAI and CCA. During one event at Fort Mason, the San Francisco Poster Syndicate provided hand-printed protest signs for marching adjuncts, while California Society of Printmakers member, long-time activist and SFAI adjunct Art Hazelwood and the Great Tortilla Conspiracy used chocolate syrup to screen print satirical images on edible quesadillas.

At CCA, Alisa Golden spearheaded a "bind-in" of handmade books whose pages detailed the personal struggles of contingent workers on campus. The power of converting spectator to participant—anyone willing to grab a needle and thread—was essential in this quiet but effective action. CCA adjunct Noga Wizansky describes the "pleasure of making" that the binders experienced. Noga reprised this project for participants at the *Faculty Forward* conference in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 2017.



SEIU leaders took note of the potential of these creative art actions to inspire engagement and influence campaigns. A group of San Francisco Bay Area adjuncts was invited to collaborate in a multimedia art performance at the *SEIU Unstoppable Convention* in 2016 in Detroit. The performance included screenprinting posters (my role), chanting, poetry, a satirical skit where chocolate diplomas were awarded and a rousing, sing-along rendition of *Solidarity Forever* that closed the show.

This event was designed to encourage more creative approaches to activism and was well received by convention goers. We printed and gave away over 50 posters, and engaged with workers across a broad range of industries through performance and art making not typically a part of union activism. As one worker commented to me, “We usually hold signs and walk around in a circle.”

## Part II

Recognizing the power of art to communicate and connect in the public sphere, questions remain for me about the relationship of aesthetics and activism or beauty and the struggle. The slow, layered, technical complexity that I seek in my personal work as a printmaker bears little consequence in the activist’s arena where one must make a point quickly and without ambiguity. As a studio artist I make prints that often take months to complete; prints for our public actions must be executed in a matter of hours or days. In my personal work, I print photopolymer plates augmented with thin veils of monotype color. The nature of this process makes it impractical in a public setting and unlikely to engage onlookers.

For our public print actions my work has been technically simple, visually bold and direct. These prints do not look or feel like “my work” to me even though I designed the images, fabricated the matrix and printed them myself. That doesn’t mean that these public printmaking experiences have not been richly rewarding. Having a large number of people possess something that I have made is gratifying. While efforts in my studio result in small editions finding their way into a few hands, in the activist world we can place scores of prints with an audience for whom owning any kind of art may be a new experience.

Throughout my involvement in the labor movement I have grappled with these questions: Should I attempt to somehow synthesize my private studio imagery with my public printmaking? Would it be more ethical to abandon pursuit of the lyrical and poetic in favor of the direct and polemic? Is my work as an artist or activist somehow flawed if I cannot bridge this divide? I worry that my political prints are not rich or complex enough and that my studio work may lack relevance.

Though my work as a studio artist and an activist remains disconcertingly disconnected, I believe that there may be more bifurcation in artists’ work than is readily apparent. Visiting the recent Magritte exhibition at San Francisco

Museum of Modern Art I wondered how much work is redacted from what we think of as an artist’s oeuvre? Significant exhibition space was dedicated to Magritte’s little known period of sunshine surrealism, brushy and bright like a Renoir, complicating the Magritte I thought I knew. Hannah Hoch, now studied for her Dada collage work challenging notions of gender and body image, once proudly designed embroidery patterns for women’s hobby publications. Although Francisco Goya painted portraits of Spanish royalty, later in life he created prints intensely political and blisteringly critical of those in power. The imagery in his folio *The Disasters of War* is so violent, disturbing and subversive that the editions were not published until after his death.

In our current political climate, as in Goya’s time, it is imperative that artists speak out. Work that aims to challenge, provoke and agitate is indispensable for public action. In this era when the very foundation of our democracy is shaking, does the urgency for images designed for public action supplant the necessity of art that aims to provide a vehicle for quiet contemplation? Is it more useful to scream, chant and wave our signs or to dream, play and whisper our innermost feelings?

Fellow adjunct, artist and activist Noga Wizansky offers, “We don’t need to speak in just one mode. We can use our visual capacities differently depending on context.” In a recent *New York Times* feature on David Wojnarowicz (1954–1992), a multi-disciplinary artist and activist whose work challenged the indifference of the powerful in the face of the AIDS epidemic, fellow artist Zoe Leonard confesses to Wojnarowicz that she fears her photographs might be too preoccupied with beauty. Wojnarowicz said to her, “These are so beautiful, and that’s what we’re fighting for. We’re being angry and complaining because we have to, but where we want to go is back to beauty. If you let go of that, we don’t have anywhere to go.”

## Artist Information

Robin McCloskey is a San Francisco Bay Area artist working in printmaking, painting, mixed media and digital imaging. Her prints combine photo derived and manipulated imagery with traditional and experimental printmaking techniques.

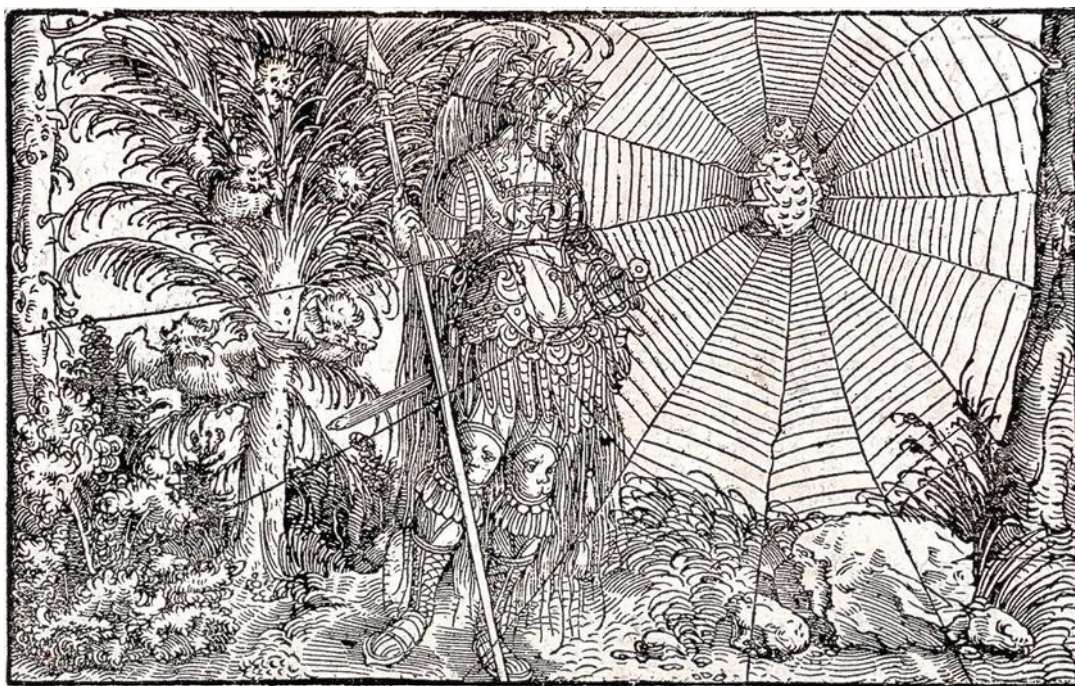
She has recently begun a project to create maps of all 50 states in the US. Layered in the maps are images that reference local history, personal narrative or native fauna.

Robin has taught in numerous art departments including San Francisco State University, Cabrillo College, and the Academy of Art University. She currently teaches Printmaking, Drawing, Graphic Design and Illustration at Dominican University. [robinmccloskey.net](http://robinmccloskey.net)

## Image Documentation

Robin McCloskey, *Cesar Chavez Day*, relief print, 9" x 7", 2016, designed and carved for a union event printing in front of the school cafeteria at Dominican University.

Robin McCloskey, silkscreen posters given away as part of a multimedia arts performance, *SEIU Unstoppable Convention*, 2016.



## THE SLEEP OF REASON: THE WOODCUTS OF HANS WEIDITZ

**Brian D. Cohen**

I collect prints and I also make them, probably for much the same reasons. I love the language of the medium, its breadth, its textures, its history, its themes, its commentary, contemplation, subversion, faith, observation, humor and irony. I collect prints because prints have said things that paintings have often not been able to, or chosen to speak of, and because prints have spoken to whole groups of people who never looked at paintings. Printmaking is not only a distinct language, but a distinct culture, a separate country.

I also collect prints because I continue to discover things I didn't know, have never seen before, and couldn't imagine. I saw the image directly above on eBay and found it quizzical, confounding, perplexing and captivating. Who is this ornately armored, androgynous figure with leonine kneepads? Is he/she helplessly caught by the spider's web, or outside of it? Is he/she in league with that enormous creature? I bid on and acquired the print but couldn't get a handle on it. The image seemed to possess an inexplicable immediacy while remaining stubbornly resistant to interpretation, and I couldn't stop looking at it.

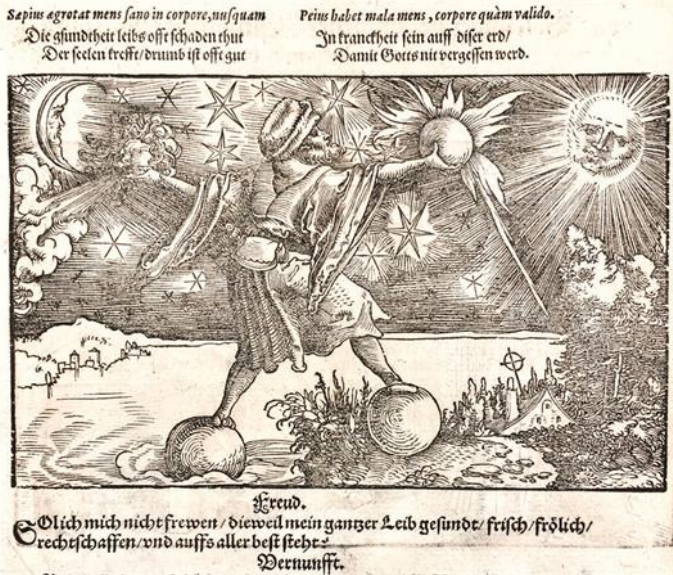
The artist, Hans Weiditz the Younger (ca. 1495 Freiburg–ca. 1537 Bern), is himself something of a mystery; his vast presumed oeuvre unsigned, with four exceptions, each signed differently. His name was forgotten until 1904, when he was cited as the illustrator of an herbarium *The Brunfels Herbal*, one of the first modern scientific botanical books. Known for years only as the Petrarch Master, Weiditz created versatile, prolific and distinctive illustrations appearing in books published throughout all

of Europe. He had his choice of subjects and he embraced everything. The advent of printmaking in the 15<sup>th</sup> century opened to artists the depiction of themes and subjects that would never likely make their way into an altarpiece, mural or manuscript; scenes from daily life, caricature, popular history or folklore, political or social commentary or propaganda, treatises on anatomy and botany, news, almanacs, poems and songs. The Church sponsored artists, including Weiditz, to create prints of saints and apostles from the Old and New Testament, often sold as indulgences, while those same artists wouldn't hesitate to create satirical and polemical prints critical of the Church when not under its employ. As the technologies of printing and printmaking, exactly repeatable written/pictorial statements, emerged and took root, authors wrote to a wider lay audience in the local vernacular language rather than in Greek or Latin. Artists depicted the lives of those regular folks who, given the affordability and accessibility of prints, could buy and enjoy prints and see themselves in their imagery.

In his time Weiditz was unique in his acute observation and his expressive and descriptive depiction of a broad range of society. His 1532 magnum opus, illustrations to *De remediis utriusque fortunae* by Petrarch (1304–1374), is a prose work of two hundred and fifty-three dialogues on aspects of moral philosophy. The illustrations comprise a myriad of pretty much any good or bad scenarios that can befall an individual, village or society.

The premise of Petrarch's book is that our own ideas and actions affect favorable or unfavorable outcomes in our lives, though fate seems to play its own changeable role and sometimes all we can do is hope. Petrarch offers instructive exercises to overcome adversity, and advises equanimity and

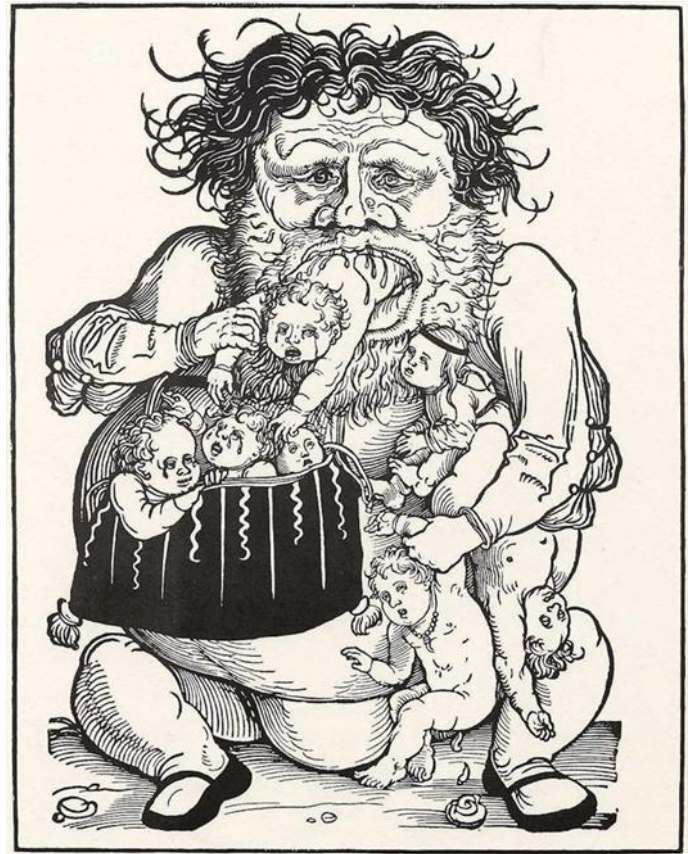




courage in the face of physical pain, the vagaries of nature, and the deception and cruelty of fellow human beings. Weiditz looks at the human predicament with relentless scrutiny and unflinching detail, and with occasional poignancy and frequent satire. In this panoply of society every person can identify his station, circumstances and surroundings, as well as his hopes and fears.

I learned that the print I bought is from among the many in *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, and prefaces Chapter 7, *Von Verstand (On Reason)*. Petrarch's text tells us that the armored figure, Pallas Athena, the personification of Wisdom, is antagonized by the spider because of the cleverness and subtlety (sophistry) with which she spins her web. We are reassured that the false and tenuous reasoning her web represents is easily cut through by Reason's sharp sword wielded by Athena. But is that what the image shows us? Pallas Athena looks thoughtful but disconsolate, immobile and ineffectual as strands of the spider's web shoot by her, through her eyes, parallel to the sword at her side, reaching every corner of the frame, expanding throughout the picture plane and implicating even the viewer's space. The spider hardly seems subdued. Is Weiditz undermining Petrarch's confident moral lesson? We are thrown into uncertainty and denied the clarity and consolation the text seems to offer. In illustrating an abstract philosophical concept, Weiditz chooses to challenge and indeed undermine its meaning. The only image from this period comparably inscrutable, unresolvable, and ambiguous is *Melancholia I* by Weiditz's slightly older contemporary, Albrecht Dürer, and in more modern times, Francisco Goya's etching *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, from his *Los Caprichos*. In all three images, reason is overwhelmed, rendered helpless and bereft of agency, and absorbed or nullified by larger forces of darkness and irrationality.

Weiditz examined a multitude of aspects of life and society with unsparing and incisive sense of unseen forces, lethal possibilities, moral pitfalls, mystery, pretense, anguish,



delusion, inequality, loss and inevitability. In engaging these themes he would later be joined by Breughel, Daumier and Goya, but in his era he stands virtually alone. It shouldn't be surprising that this image has so much contemporary resonance; Weiditz remains frighteningly familiar and sadly instructive.

### Writer's Information

Brian D. Cohen is a printmaker, painter, educator and writer. In 1989 he founded Bridge Press to further the association and integration of visual image, original text and book structure. Artist's books and prints by Brian D. Cohen have been shown in over forty individual exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Fresno Art Museum and in over 200 group shows. Cohen's books and etchings are held by major private and public collections throughout the country. He was first-place winner of major international print competitions in San Diego, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. and the Prix de Print. His essays on the arts and education are a feature of *Art in Print* and *Parenthesis* magazines and the Arts and Culture section of the Huffington Post.

[www.briandcohen.com](http://www.briandcohen.com)

### Image Documentation

Hans Weiditz, *Von Verstand (On Reason)*, from Petrarch, *De remediis utriusque fortuna*, woodcut, 4" x 6"

Hans Weiditz, *Man and the Four Elements*, from Petrarch, *De remediis utriusque fortuna*, woodcut, 3.75" x 6.3"

Hans Weiditz, *Der Kinderfresser (Child Guzzler)*, a popular figure on carnival broadsheets who terrifies children, woodcut, 4" x 2.75"





## RESIGNATION

### Marcelo Román Kopp

It's impossible to think separately about printmaking and politics in Argentina.

Rosario, the Argentinian city I live in, has an important printmaking history. In 1942, the first Argentinian Salon of National Printmaking opened in the Municipal Museum of Rosario. Until then art salons were exclusively dedicated to drawing and painting. Although engraving existed in Argentina, it was thought outside the realm of legitimate art. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political pamphlets and book illustrations were the common product of printmaking. A group of left wing artists, The Artists of the People, made up of Adolfo Bellocq, Guillermo Hebequer and Jose Arato, among others, used printmaking to awaken consciousness in the working class and spread their message to the masses. In the 1930s, Antonio Berni, a teacher at the Municipal Museum of Rosario, founded a group of visual artists with a realistic aesthetic, influenced by the Mexican muralist Siqueiros. This group laid the ideological and aesthetic foundations of local art for future generations. It is no coincidence that Berni, a Rosario resident, was the first Argentine artist to be awarded a prize for his engravings at the 1962 Venice Biennale.

All printmakers of Rosario inherit a history of political art and social commitment. Their choice of discipline is not a whim. The selection of materials implies a political position. Wood is, and has been, the most accessible of materials throughout history. Examples include the T'ang dynasty of

the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Dürer in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hokusai in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Kirchner in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Argentina the tradition of printmaking included left wing pamphleteering and the denunciation of corruption and class inequality. In Rosario, from the 1940s, a recurring theme appears in the work of Minturn Zerva, Ricardo Warecki, Leonidas Gambartes and Juan Grela. These artists focus on the margins of the city, where urban neighborhoods grow into surrounding countryside and are affected by environmental degradation. I explore that in my own work, adding some critical symptoms of our time.

Although my technique is similar to wood engraving, I call it *xilografía a contraveta*. I prepare end grain cuts, sand them to a mirror finish, then begin cutting with a burin. I don't use maple, cherry or boxwood. I use Palo Blanco, whose Latin name is *calycophyllum multiflorum*. It is a wood found in the South American countries of Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. It is usually used for broomsticks and is quite hard. Traditionally Palo Blanco was used in Argentine woodcut before the appearance of MDF or PVC.

My country has adopted the agro-export model. Pampa plain, smooth and fertile, is ideal for agricultural production. In Argentina, "the granary of the world," great riches produced by exports are concentrated in very few hands. Rosario is one of its most important urban centers, whose wealth derives from the port on the great Paraná River. It is surrounded by endless kilometers of farmland.

In my series, *Resignation*, there are references to Durer, Dore and Brueghel among others. There are many





recurring symbols including the skull with the soy plant used by environmentalists to denounce the damage of glyphosate, the silo as an index of accumulation and private property and the character of the fumigator. There are also representations of city structures and sites (the bridge, soccer stadium and river of Rosario) that have been degraded. For me, it is an exercise in appropriation, a series of historic stylistic wood engravings in the form of denunciation and proof of environmental damage generated by indiscriminate agricultural activity and the exploitation of natural resources.

### Artist Information

Marcelo Kopp was born in Rosario, Argentina on February 19, 1986. He is a professor and technician in visual arts. He has received prizes in paintings and made illustration and graphic design works, however he dedicates most of his time to wood engraving.

[marcelokopp.blogspot.com](http://marcelokopp.blogspot.com)

### Image Documentation

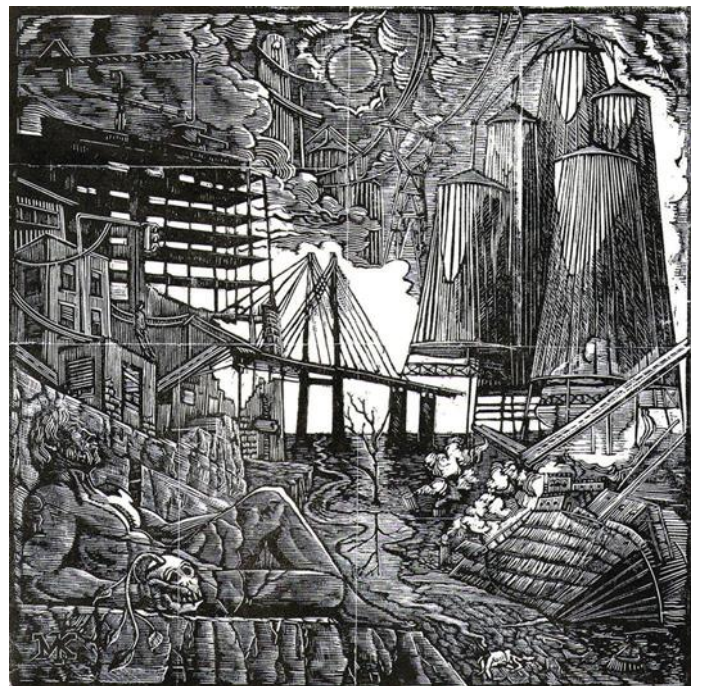
*Salome Eating From the Poisoned Earth*, multiple block wood engraving, 4" x 4", 2018

*Fishing From the Poisoned River*, multiple blockwood engraving, 4" x 4", 2018

*The Extermination*, multiple block wood engraving, 8" x 8", 2018

*The Fumigator*, multiple block wood engraving, 4.72" x 2", 2017

*The Drought*, multiple block, 8" x 8", 2018







## POLLUTA, THE FLOATING PARADISE

**Michelle Kuen Suet Fung**

In 2084, the imaginary country *Contradictoria* has solved its pollution problem with *Plan Polluta*. Under this plan, air pollution is condensed into building bricks, which are used to build arcologies called *Polluta*, floating green vibrant artist colonies! Artists can live, work and show for free, forever! It sounds too good to be true. It is.

*Polluta* was meant as a joke, a wry serious joke. This body of oil-based woodblock prints on cloud-dragon handmade paper features ninety-nine unique propaganda prints—seven completed and ongoing. Each print features one aspect of this ecotopia. *Polluta* is perhaps my crazy solution to mind-boggling problems: pollution, artists' struggle with money and integrity and world politics, knowing fully that it is not a viable solution. It is a feverish murmur, perhaps a frustrated joke.

### Political Origins of Chinese Woodblock Prints

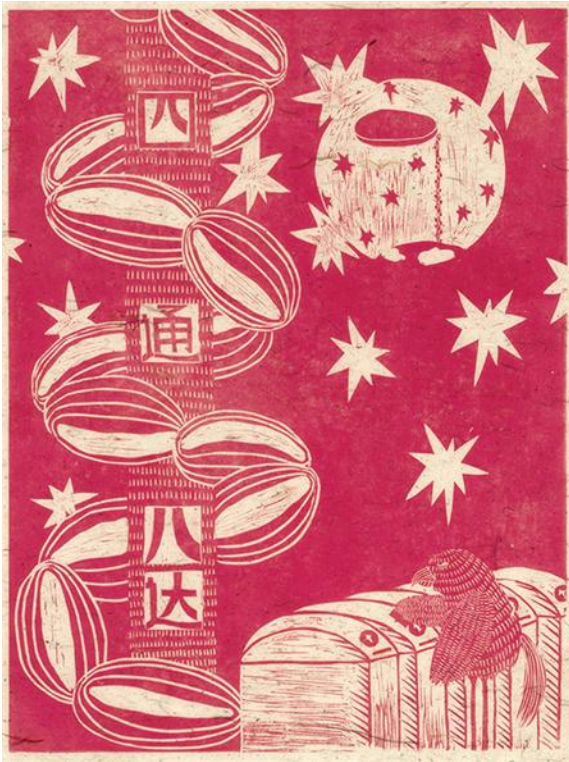
Woodblock prints have existed in China as an artistic medium for over one thousand years, but underwent substantial changes and became political tools in the early twentieth century. Traditional Chinese woodblock prints, unfailingly busy, cheerful and life-affirming, were popular with folklore and religious purposes and used ink and watercolours exclusively. In the light of recent shameful national defeats such as the First Sino-Japanese War and the Boxer Protocol, China saw an explosion of patriotic self-awakening sentiment in the 1920s, when Chinese intellectuals looked west for enlightenment. In this New

Culture Movement, led by cultural luminaries such as Cai Yuan Pei and Chen Du Xiu, art education was believed to be an effective tool for social improvement. Woodblock printers began a grassroots movement and sought a conscious departure from both expensive literati ink paintings, reserved for scholars and oil on canvas paintings which were recently introduced by the first generation of Chinese artists who studied abroad.

These avant-garde printmakers made a conscious effort to align with proletarians in these somber, monochromatic prints. However, it is highly unlikely that their works actually reached the masses; in the 1930–40s these “proletariat” prints were only accessible through publication in literary journals, public exhibitions and in private circulation. Even though later traveling exhibitions attracted a fair number of visitors, the movement carried on largely unnoticed by the masses the printmakers wanted to address and impress the most.

The effectiveness of woodblock prints as a mass medium truly blossomed when they were adopted to spread official messages in the 1960s. This grassroots movement was endorsed by the state as early as 1935, when the state sponsored a multi-city traveling exhibition, *The National Joint Woodcut Exhibition*. Yet, the state's enthusiastic usage of woodblock prints in the 1960s had an effect much like Instagram or Facebook posts on an organization's official social media pages today, spreading official messages like wildfire. These printed posters were displayed widely and prominently all over the country, from metropolitan cities down to small rural villages. Slogans on these posters became the mantras of those days.





### Historical Context and Precedents

My choice of a medium laden with political resonance was no coincidence. The complex history of Chinese woodblocks echoes the duality of the *Polluta* story. *Polluta*'s promise makes every artist's pupils dilate. Give an artist shelter, food, studio, art supplies and a bunch of talented artist friends. Isn't this what artist residencies are supposed to be? However, behind that relentless optimism in the promotional print materials, there is, always, a caveat.

For me, the shiny facade of *Polluta* seems confusing at best. The privileges in *Polluta* come with a price: artists cannot have a normal family life (family members except for artists are not allowed to stay on premise after 11pm) and they have no access to outside entertainment (even the amusement park in their backyard is only accessible twice a year). One cannot help but wonder if *Polluta* is a conspiracy to lock all artists up, out of sight from a functioning society. Artists are free to form families as long as it's all incestuous within the artistic circle. Oh, and children are not allowed to live there!

*Polluta* was largely an intellectual exercise to make sense of the art world. Hong Kong, where I have been based for the past few years, emerged as an international player when Art Basel purchased Art Hong Kong in 2011. In the following year, 1,661 art exhibitions took place in the city, an average of 4.5 exhibitions per day! In *I Love Art Basel*, Leung argues that superstar brands chose to open Hong Kong branches purely for geographic convenience and economic reasons;<sup>1</sup> cultural and historical considerations were not part of

the picture, while Hong Kong's bustling international art market (blue-chip galleries, art fairs and auction houses) led a parallel existence completely detached from the local social fabric. Regular gallery goers detect a growing trend of exhibiting artists' diminishing age, sometimes having solo exhibitions even before their grad shows! This phenomenon is perhaps unsurprising considering how an alluring art market beckons promising fame, opportunities, and security for unproven artists facing an uncertain future. And there is some substance there, as I have personally lost count of how many times artist interviews are featured on financial channels, and how often dollar signs enter the conversation. Yet, money increasingly seems to be the only worthwhile yardstick. This overbearing worship of the market propelled me towards the other extreme, an idealized world with no poisonous capitalist vapor—an artist colony.

As a point of comparison, consider how creative artists were grouped together in the Artists' Union of the USSR between 1932 and 1993, where they were pampered and their every want catered to. Food, lodging, exhibition space and studios were provided along with holiday amenities. Multiple picturesque locations were available to which the artist could move, using Union funds. Tell me you won't kill for that. Even though everything was free, there really was no free lunch. Just like artists in the capitalist system, socialist artists were expected to produce cultural activities of value. Commercial domination is replaced by a political one. In such a system, "The objective criterion for defining a cultural value is its progressive character for society."<sup>2</sup>





Individual insights? What is that? Pollutarian ideology explains how that manifests in artistic activities:

Art should portray an optimistic picture of *Polluta*.

Art should further our national environmental causes.

Art should be honest about the world today. Myth, folklore and fairy tales are strongly discouraged.

In order to protect the equilibrium of our sacred ecotopia, artists should strive to nurture and protect Pollutarian ideology.

In case that was not clear enough, the Four No's remind you that art should be of no "innovation, inspiration, intuition and investigation." "The artist finds herself selling her soul, piece by piece, until nothing is left but an empty husk."<sup>3</sup> However, accepted *Polluta* residents should not be caught by surprise. The only application channel to *Polluta* is an entry interview in which the potential resident is to answer one question from the *Polluta* President. Interviewees with any sign of spunk or flair were instantly rejected. One interviewee, initially accepted, began making the logo drawing into a hangman game. (Each interviewee was requested to complete a *Polluta* logo.) Visibly annoyed, the *Polluta* President revoked her decision and rejected this applicant. Another applicant had better luck. The President asked her to pick three essential items to bring to Mars. Obviously flustered, the interviewee eventually blurted out "water, a form of communication and a compass." The enraptured president shrieked in delight, "You are boring! I like it! You are accepted into *Polluta*!"

### ***Polluta* and America Today**

Is this the price of a safe haven? What is a safe haven? Since World War II, the US has been a magnet for refugees and immigrants. The American Dream not only attracted the



desperate, but also the ambitious and the talented. Indeed, one can argue that American's current cultural dominance is largely built upon an influx of intellectuals since the 1930s. Think scientist Albert Einstein, Google co-founder Sergey Brin and architect Ieoh Ming Pei.

Recent American hostility towards immigrants, exemplified at the border, seem to make a sick and twisted joke out of the American Dream. During the recent *Polluta* exhibition, 2000 immigrant children were separated from their parents. President Trump summarized this attitude by saying that "They are animals."<sup>4</sup> Have we all, like *Polluta* residents, been reduced to our basest and most animal instincts?

Getting far less public attention but perhaps even more unsettling has been a growing challenge to naturalized citizenship. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services was charged "to identify people who lied on their citizenship applications and to denaturalize them."<sup>5</sup> While these attempts were putatively aimed at those who deliberately lied on their applications, in many other cases the line between a lie and a misunderstanding or honest mistake seems fuzzy at best. One is almost certain that the benefit of doubt is not given to the immigrant. The same arbitrariness is echoed by *Polluta*'s entry performance. The applicant's acceptance hinges on his/her answer to a single question. Such an important decision (one is supposed to live in *Polluta*, forever!) is contingent on numerous frivolous factors, nervousness, picking the wrong question and the President's whims and fancy. It is clear that access





to *Polluta's* resources is not a right one has earned, but a privilege granted by authority, to be taken away at a moment's notice. With political power being reshuffled across the world's stage, one cannot help but to fear what the future holds, especially for creatives whose profession is to voice their opinions. In this uncertain atmosphere, the promise of *Polluta* looks like an awfully inviting paradise, as long as one is willing to abide to a few housekeeping rules.

<sup>1</sup>Leung, Anthony Po Shan. *I Love Art Basel*. (translated title) *Dirty Press*, Hong Kong, 2018. P. 52-57.

<sup>2</sup>Zvorykin, A. A., *Studies and Documents on Cultural Policies: Cultural Policy in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*. P. 10., <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000012/001240eo.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Choi, Joon Nak, "Polluta as the Mirror of Truth", *Polluta Floating Artist Colony in the Sky*. Hong Kong, 2018, P. 50

<sup>4</sup>McCarthy, Tom., *Deadly and Unconstitutional: Trump Attacks California Sanctuary Cities*, *The Guardian*. 7 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/16/california-sanctuary-city-laws-donald-trump-attack>

<sup>5</sup>Gessen, Masha. *In America, Naturalized Citizens No Longer Have an Assumption of Permanence*, *The New Yorker*, 18 June 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/in-america-naturalized-citizens-no-longer-have-an-assumption-of-permanence>

### Artist Information

Michelle Kuen Suet Fung is a visual artist and art educator whose ongoing oeuvre revolves around a grand narrative of a dystopian world set in the year 2084. With bold imagination,



subtle humour, and delicate pathos, she weaves acute observations of the early twenty-first century into an absurd, fantastical landscape populated with plastic-eating "humans", flying elephants and islands floating in the sky. Her works present a fictional geopolitical map of a bizarre future, one impacted by changes in the Anthropocene. She has exhibited internationally and has participated in artist residencies including Banff Centre, Canada; Island Institute, Alaska; and Art Omi, New York (the Cecily Brown Fellowship). Her works have received awards including 50 Best Books for Secondary Students, Hong Kong Professional Teacher's Union, 2018; Young Writer's Debut Competition, Hong Kong, 2017; the Grotto Award, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2015; and Award of Excellence, Fourth Greater China Illustration Awards, 2012 and 2016.

[michelleksfung.com](http://michelleksfung.com)

### Image Documentation

*Fifth of Ninety-Nine Views of Polluta: All Roads Lead to Polluta*, Oil-based woodblock print on cloud-dragon handmade paper, 18" x 23.5", 2018

*Fourth of Ninety-Nine Views of Polluta: High Spirits in the Green Sun*, Oil-based woodblock print on cloud-dragon handmade paper, 23.5" x 18", 2018

*Sixth of Ninety-Nine Views of Polluta: the Hub in the Sky*, Oil-based woodblock print on cloud-dragon handmade paper, 23.5" x 18", 2018

*Second of Ninety-Nine Views of Polluta: Fragrance in the Air*, Oil-based woodblock print on cloud-dragon handmade paper, 18" x 23.5", 2018

*Polluta Performance*, dimensions variable, Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland, CA, USA, June 2018

*Third of Ninety-Nine Views of Polluta: Green New World*, Oil-based woodblock print on cloud-dragon handmade paper, 23.5" x 18", 2018

Liu Lun, *Baba cong qianxian daihuilai de wanju* (*The toy daddy brought back from the front*), woodcut on paper, 1945, © The Trustees of the British Museum

Li Hua, *China, Roar!*, Woodcut, 8" x 6" 1936 (the hi-res digital copy depicted above via *A Journey Round My Skull*), The Huntington Archive, public domain



# THE CALIFORNIA PRINTMAKER

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